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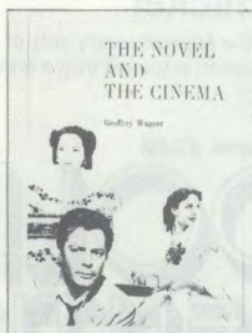
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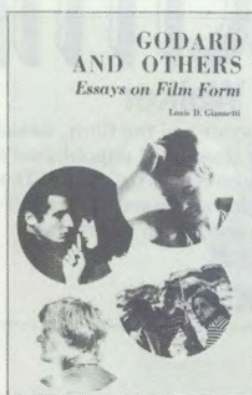


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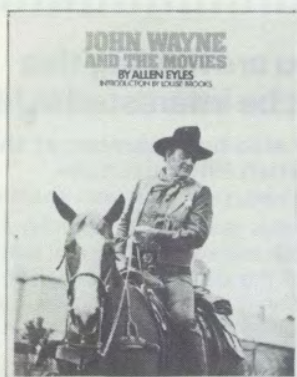
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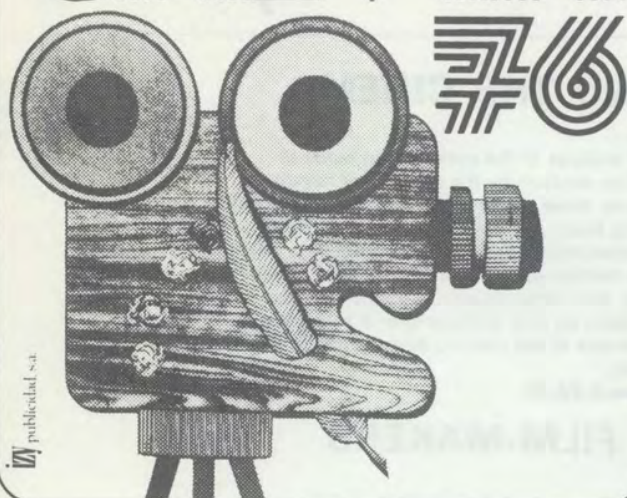
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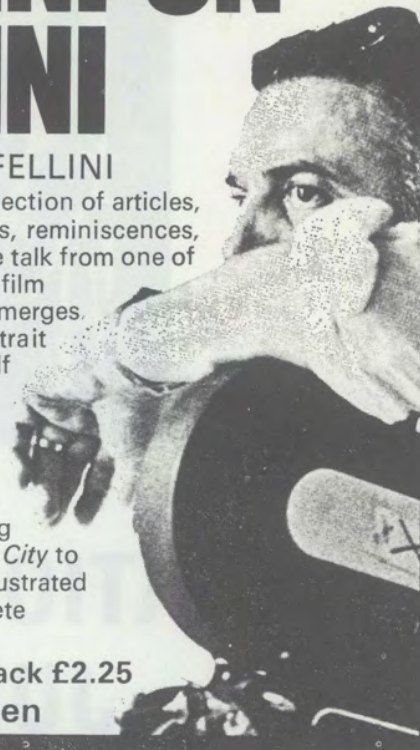
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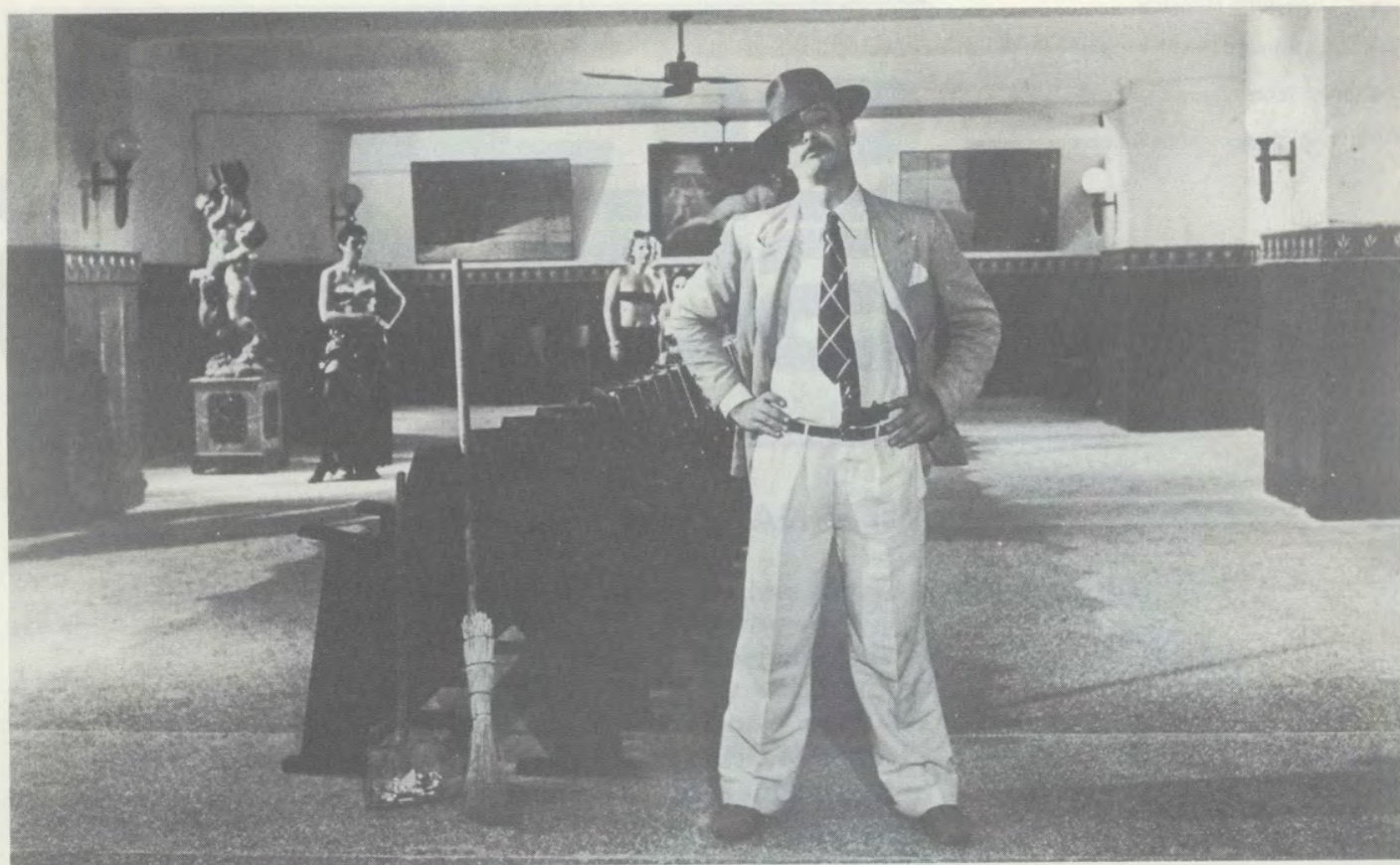
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*On the cover: Barbara Harris
in Hitchcock's 'Family Plot'*

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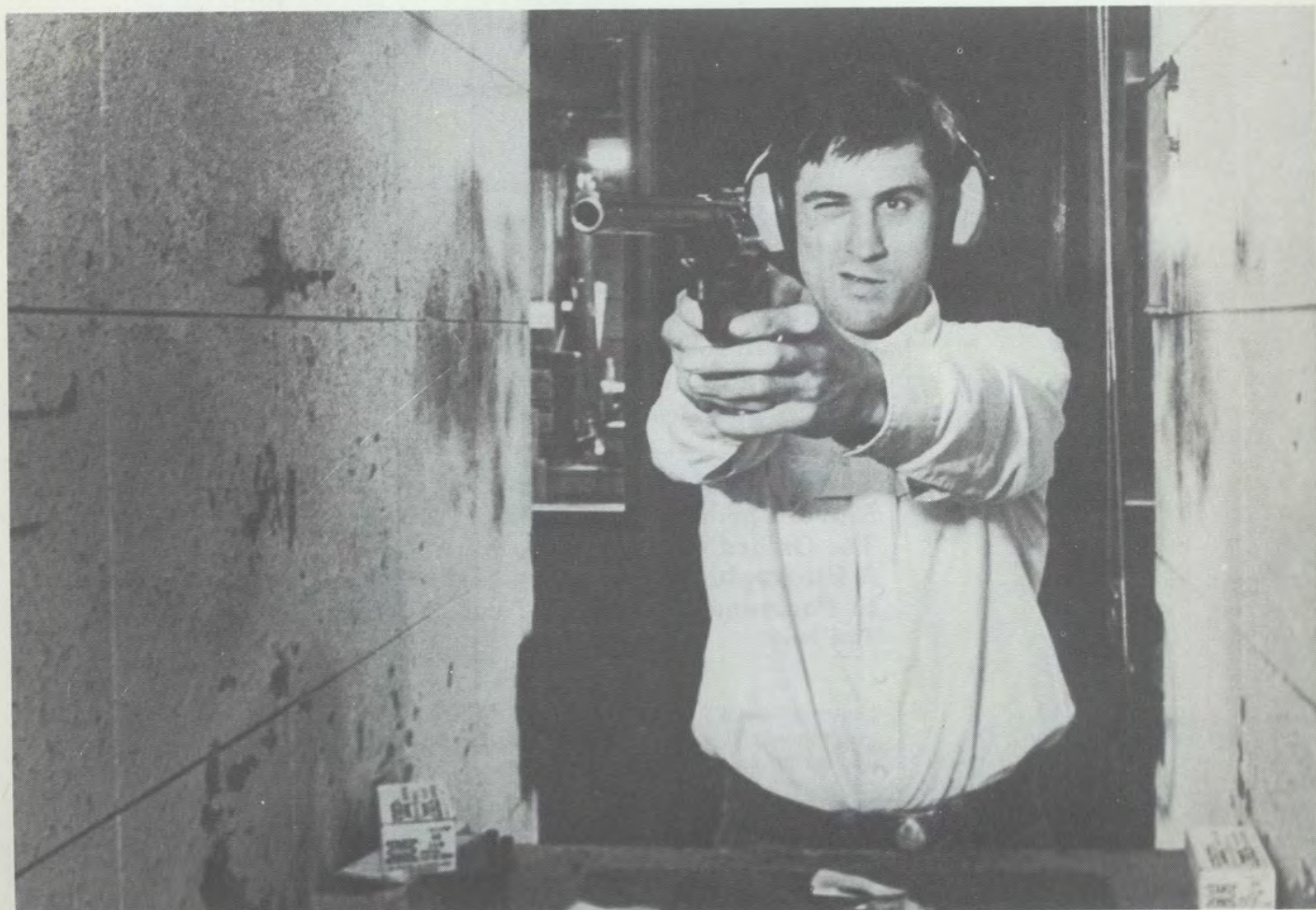
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BEAUTIES AND THE BEAST

Seven Beauties/Taxi Driver

Colin L. Westerbeck Jr.



There are some movies that are clearly not just movies. They are phenomena. I do not necessarily mean that they are what *Variety* calls 'Big Boffo', films whose grosses are up in the top fifty of all time. Some of the movies I am talking about—*The Exorcist*, for instance, or *2001*—are 'Big Boffo'; but others, such as Bergman's *Scenes from a Marriage*, are by their nature successful only with a limited audience. It is not the size of the audience that matters here, but the intensity of its reaction. Beyond entertainment, what the three films just mentioned offered their audiences was provocation. They tapped into people's emotions at a deeper level than movies are usually able to reach, and inspired passionate, sometimes even crazed responses. Aside from whether they are good art or bad, movies like these have an effect something like that which jazz musician Mezz Mezzrow once attributed to heroin: they 'turn you every which-a-way but loose.'

Not every season produces such movies, but recently two have appeared in New York that seem to qualify, Lina Wertmüller's *Seven Beauties* and Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*. These films first opened next door to each other on a strip of Manhattan's upper east side where the four movie theatres that are the city's most prestigious are located in a single block. From there, each film has spread its influence all over town. If the social life that I lead is any indication (and I think it is), *Seven Beauties* is the most talked about movie this year, perhaps the most talked about subject. The numerous local interviews with Lina Wertmüller have about them a stunned and panting tone, and each seems to have been conducted by someone who has come directly from the theatre to talk to her. *Seven Beauties* has been playing in that one theatre since some time last year, and under its sway every other film Wertmüller has made has also been premiered or revived; for a while, four of her films were playing simultaneously in the midtown area.

Nor is Scorsese's film far behind. Several days before it opened, Pauline Kael gave it so laudatory a review in the *New Yorker* that the film's publicists immediately ran advertisements reproducing the whole review. The day that the film opened, the *New York Times* ran a very tantalising background article on its making. Scorsese has now spread out to other theatres too, and *Taxi Driver* is currently playing in two other midtown locations, besides its original one. Perhaps most intriguing, though, is the composition of the crowd that is being attracted to it, ranging from rather tough-looking teenagers to overdressed dowagers, from middle-class couples out on a date to, I would guess, taxi drivers sneaking a few hours away from the job. The audience seems, in point of fact, very much the same wide cross-section of New York's population that appears in the movie itself.

Not all movies that become phenomena of this sort are alike, of course. On the contrary, what gives a movie this appeal is often something fortuitously unique and, to Hollywood's chagrin, inimitable. But in this case, I think the films really are comparable. Their audiences overlap to some extent, and were it not for *Seven Beauties'* foreignness and subtitles, this overlap would probably be greater. What is more, both films try to spellbind their audience in the same way. After first putting us at ease with a human predicament that is laughable, each film sidles gradually, at times almost

unnoticeably, towards something far more serious. Each works on us by a kind of synaesthesia, confusing the impressions we get in one situation with the sense we have of another. Mingling sensations until they become indistinguishable, the cause of one seeming to produce the effects of another, these films succeed by playing upon our perceptions until we can no longer tell certain experiences apart.

It is not only in the nature of their appeal, then, that the two films are alike, but in the very way they are put together—the way they generate that appeal. *Seven Beauties* opens with an embrace between Hitler and Mussolini, and from that follows, in the first five minutes of the film, all of World War II. Beginning with bombardment, explosion and plane crash, some newsreel footage moves next to shots of a few snow-bound refugees, then to the unburied dead, and finally to abandoned, bombed-out cities. Only after we have thus been transported from apocalypse to desolation are we ready to meet Pasqualino 'Seven Beauties' (Giancarlo Giannini), who emerges from the sepia-tinted newsreel like the lone fugitive from an otherwise total destruction. In the last few seconds of the newsreel, a train hit by an air attack bursts open its sealed doors and spills Pasqualino into a wood somewhere in Germany. From the murky brown of the newsreel inside the train, Pasqualino is plunged into the murky blue of *Seven Beauties'* colour photography outside. What connects the two is his passage through a moment of absolute night and darkness during which Wertmüller has, without our realising it, switched film stocks. It is a neat piece of work that anticipates perfectly a kind of moral hocus-pocus which goes on in the film as a whole.

Once Pasqualino is free of the train, it turns out that he is not alone, for he bumps into another Italian soldier, Francesco. As they wander together trying to escape detection by German troops, Pasqualino reminisces about his life in Italy, and the film begins a series of flashbacks that continues throughout his flight, eventual capture and internment in a Nazi concentration camp. What the flashbacks reveal is that at home in Italy, Pasqualino was an utter punk, but a rather charming one. His memories begin with the time his obese sister, Concetta, was performing in a music hall. Pasqualino goes there to accost her in her dressing room after her act. He tells her that she has no talent, and that the pimp who has been telling her otherwise is leading her on. Her only defence is to protest pathetically that the man has promised to marry her. In this scene, as in many that

follow, Pasqualino claims to be 'a man of respect', upholder of the family honour in all disputes. But the point of the scene is that, like Concetta's singing and dancing, Pasqualino's honour is just a bad act.

The scene opens on Concetta's clumsily dancing legs, and when Pasqualino makes his entrance it is also with a shot of his legs as he walks down the stairs into the music hall. His gait just happens to be in time to her music, which establishes at once that, between her strut and his swagger, there is nothing to choose. As he bawls her out they are sitting at her dressing-room table, and instead of looking at her, he looks into the mirror. Like Concetta when she puts on the make-up for her performance, he is only posing and preening in the glass, putting on a false face that is ugly and overdone. The next day, when he meets a waif crying in the street because she doesn't sing well with her father's barrel-organ, Pasqualino cheers her up by suggesting she tell anyone who complains that she is the fiancée of Pasqualino, a man to be reckoned with. So saying, he repeats with this girl precisely the deceit for which he has reviled the pimp encouraging his sister. But of course Pasqualino's motive is only to console the girl, and what was cruelty and exploitation two scenes ago is now sweet and noble. It all goes to show that judgment is relative, all judgment.

Through all its consequences, Pasqualino's dispute with Concetta's boyfriend is pure comedy of errors. When the man refuses to keep his promise of marriage, Pasqualino threatens him with a gun that accidentally goes off and kills the fellow. When the local Mafia chief, who is Pasqualino's counsellor in the ways of honour, tells him to dispose of the body, Pasqualino obediently sets about hacking it up for shipment out of town. But first the body almost bests him in a wrestling match; then, as he lugs the suitcases with the body in them through the streets, a dog sniffing at their contents gets Pasqualino at bay and makes him the centre of attention. He no more than gets rid of the cases, when the police charge in to arrest him; and he no more than escapes their pursuit, turning defiantly to boast that they would never have taken him alive, when another detachment of cops sneaks up unseen from behind to make a fool and liar of him yet again. But all these fiascos, along with Pasqualino's incarceration and trial, are only half of *Seven Beauties*; the other half, interspersed with them, is the story of his adventures in Germany.

All the Italian sequences really do, in fact, is prime us for the German ones. The atmospheres of the former seep into the latter through Pasqualino's memories. Our first glimpse of Germany already suggests a place receptive to transformation, for in the daylight the woods in which Pasqualino and Francesco are hiding look like an enchanted forest, a misty, primeval place like something out of a German fairy-tale. It makes Francesco and Pasqualino into an Italian Hansel and Gretel lost in the Teutoburger Wald where anything might happen. What does happen, appropriately, is that they come to a witch's cottage, a mysterious rustic lodge in a clearing where an overweight *Mädchen* sits alone singing to herself. Wearing only a skimpy evening

Left, above: Pasqualino (Giancarlo Giannini) in 'Seven Beauties'. Left: Travis (Robert De Niro) in 'Taxi Driver'

gown, she seems in effect a German Concetta. In place of Italian light opera, we get here the German version, each singer's song acting as a kind of overture to the society in which Pasqualino must next make his way.

It is out of this context that Pasqualino's internment in a concentration camp develops after his capture. Just as Concetta's act is a comment on his life, a model to interpret it by, so Pasqualino's life back home is itself the model for understanding events in Germany. The concentration camp even *looks* like back home. There one of Pasqualino's favourite activities is to walk along a promenade lined with cafés and covered high overhead by a skylight; and after a while we realise that this piazza bears an eerie resemblance to the main assembly area in the camp. It too is a thoroughfare enclosed by high walls and roofed by a skylight. Indeed, in another regard, this assembly area even reminds us of the very house in which Pasqualino lives. It is also a combination work and living quarters, the mattress factory operated by his sisters occupying the same rooms they live in, and its low arches and vaulted ceilings are echoed in the assembly area by a row of similar archways along one wall. In Pasqualino's house, the only decoration is religious statuary in a glass case and a tailor's dummy suspended from a hook on one wall; and in the assembly area, likewise, shrivelled corpses lie rigid as statues and dead men hang by their necks from the beams.

The light and colour of Italy are warm and amber or roseate, while the concentration camp is all in blues and slate grey, cold colours. Yet the camp is in its horrific way as beautiful as Naples. Wertmuller has stylised her concentration camp no less than everything else in her film, veiling it in a haze of lime dust from its crematoria rather like the mist in the German forest, and the result is an environment as unreal as that forest. Immersed in such a setting, Pasqualino resorts to the only skill he has, the one that always stands him in good stead at home: he tries to seduce the camp's female commandant, and he succeeds. Hailed to her office, he stands before her with his jacket still on and his pants down around his ankles. It is exactly the same state of *déshabille* in which all those hanged men outside are left on their gibbets, but no matter. The point is that this is a world where you are damned if you do and damned if you do not, where the martyrs and the collaborationists, those who die for petty defiance and those who grovel for dear life, are finally indistinguishable. So you may as well grovel.

Like the atmosphere in which they occur, events in the camp begin to seem like a mirror image of Pasqualino's life back in Italy. Repeating an earlier sequence of those events, the film now gets it all backwards, however, just as a mirror does. Where before a bang is followed by a chuckle, when Pasqualino shoots the pimp and then has to get rid of the body, now the chuckle comes first, to smooth the way for the bang. Pasqualino's burlesque making love to the commandant is the funny part, but in its aftermath there is murder. As a reward for his performance on her office

couch, the commandant makes Pasqualino a *kapo* in charge of his barracks. But when his friend Francesco goes berserk in the assembly area one morning, Pasqualino's duties turn out to include shooting the miscreant.



'Seven Beauties': Concetta (Elena Fiore) at the music hall



'Taxi Driver': Iris (Jodie Foster) solicits from a doorway

Francesco even encourages Pasqualino to shoot in order to make it easier on him (and us). As Pasqualino fires the pistol right into the image on the screen contains, besides a tight close-up of the pistol itself, is the guards' dogs straining at their leashes in the background. When the pistol goes off, the dogs start and bark at the report. This is the sole reaction to what Pasqualino has done, and it is of course the same reaction that we observed in the street after he committed his first murder. The association of images suggests that this new murder should be thought of as somehow comparable to the earlier one; indeed, accidental and hilarious as it is, the first murder becomes

a mitigating circumstance in this grimly intentional second one.

Finally, Pasqualino returns home after the war. As his arrival is being awaited by his sisters and mother, all of whom are now prostitutes, the camera fixes on a photograph of Pasqualino taken in the old days. What a ridiculous figure he cuts with his pomaded hair, pencil-line moustache and bedroom eyes. When Pasqualino himself walks in the door, his hair is dishevelled, his face slack, his eyes wide and vacuous. As his mother stands him before a mirror (much as he did Concetta at the beginning), we see who the man of respect has become: a mere survivor. Ever since the time at which this scene is set, in fact, the only hero we have seen in Italian films has been this sort of man, this survivor. Simply to survive is the only kind of honour that any Italian writer and film-maker has proposed in the post-war era. Startling and controversial a figure as Pasqualino may seem at the end, he is really just an inheritor of the heroes of thirty years ago—of Visconti's fishermen and De Sica's old-age pensioners and bicycle thieves. Pasqualino's return home at the end of *Seven Beauties* is neo-realism brought to its ultimate, and perhaps logical, conclusion.

Though she represents the third generation of post-war film-makers to come to prominence in Italy, Lina Wertmuller's connection to the neo-realists is a reasonably direct one. Her first important assignment was as an assistant to Fellini on *8½*, and his first credit of equal importance was as scriptwriter on Rossellini's *Open City*. Fellini's influence is clear in the stylisation of Wertmuller's film, which often has about it that quality of a tableau Fellini is so deft at creating. But the social message of *Seven Beauties* returns to the original neo-realism with a vengeance and is not mediated as the style is. With its partisan heroes who endure torture and death rather than collaborate with the Nazis, *Open City* would seem to be a film that affirms everything Pasqualino is not. Yet listen to how Rossellini himself explained his point of view in discussing his next film, *Paisà*, which also deals, like *Open City* and *Seven Beauties*, with the interaction between Italy and an invader. 'There were two worlds which came into contact, each with a different psychology and mental structure. From this conflict was born a great confusion; so much so that in the end there were neither victors nor vanquished, there remained only the legendary heroism of the man who clings to life. And who lives, despite everything, whether he is one of the victors or one of the vanquished...' It is hard to imagine a more fitting apology for *Seven Beauties*.

2

Like *Seven Beauties*, *Taxi Driver* begins with a sequence that sets the mood for the entire film. In this case, it is not a whole sequence, really, but a single, protracted shot—a shot of a New York taxi cab driving down a street towards the camera through the vapour billowing out of a manhole. On the one hand, the shot just records the event non-committally: nothing happens except the passing of a taxi, and nothing changes in the focus, camera

position, etc. On the other hand, though, the shot is done with a telephoto lens and in slow motion. Since such a lens tends to retard our sense of movement, especially in a head-on shot, it and the slow motion confuse each other's effects until we are not sure what distortion we are seeing, if any. But the distortion is there, and the effect of this shot is to give the cab's approach a bizarrely dreamy effect. It is as if we were somehow detached from the scene; as if the approach of this taxi were, as they say, unhinged.

This opening shot is elaborated in a sequence that occurs a little later. At the beginning, Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro), a Vietnam veteran with insomnia, gets a night job driving a taxi; and soon, he confides to a journal which he keeps, he is working fourteen hours a day, seven days a week. To convey this total absorption of Travis' life in his job and in the night world of the city, the film becomes for a while merely a montage of his routine. The meter in his cab ticks off the fares one after another, while outside the criss-crossed city streets become an endlessly repeated shot of a red traffic light, a diagonal wipe moving across the screen each time the shot replaces itself. In the sequence that seems specifically to echo the opening shot, we get a whole series of shots of the cab travelling the streets. This time each one is done with the camera mounted on the cab itself, so that we see some part of it—the front bumper, or the New York registration medallion riveted into the bonnet—passing before the cityscape.

Again, the effect is strangely detached and isolated. The close-up detail of the cab and the long shot of the streets float over each other without being in visible contact. We can see no relationship between them, and what the physical disconnection begins to imply is some profound emotional disconnection, some state of alienation, in Travis himself. In effect, Scorsese's film is becoming a documentary of that alienation. The film's attention to quotidian reality is full of peculiarities, like the externally mounted shots of the cab and the diagonal wipes. Another is a lurid saturation of all red light in the film, so that its redness is burned in and bleeds past the edges of the traffic standards, directional signals, neon signs, etc. from which it comes. These peculiarities dislodge the film from the very reality it seems to study and change its subject from Travis' working conditions into his mental condition.

When Travis seeks out a dealer in illegal arms to sell him some pistols, the deterioration of his mind becomes explicit. Yet the process remains gradual, sometimes barely discernible. He undertakes some standard physical conditioning, but then turns from calisthenics to holding his hand over a stove flame. Target-range practice alternates with practice in front of a mirror, drawing his pistols and taking offence at insults from imaginary strangers. A rail from a cabinet drawer he seems to be fixing turns into a mechanism for ejecting a gun from his sleeve into his hand. The transitions are so uncertain that Travis seems scarcely aware of them. The course of events seems aptly described in a scene where he is rocking his television set back and forth with his foot while watching a soap opera. All of a sudden



Above: taxi driver (Robert De Niro) and passenger (Martin Scorsese); below: Travis calls on Betsy (Cybill Shepherd) at her office

the set falls over backwards and blows itself out, whereupon Travis is even more startled than we are.

Though the gradual slippings of his mind obscure the enormity of what is happening to him, Travis undergoes no less a metamorphosis than Pasqualino does in *Seven Beauties*. Like Wertmüller's film, Scorsese's advances its plot by a series of trade-offs, by exchanging one set of circumstances and actions for another. Before Travis goes to the gun salesman, the strange documentary of his life as a cabby yields to a more conventional feature film treatment. But as Travis sees the salesman and then goes into training, the documentary reasserts itself: the engine we see him working at now is a gun instead of a car, but the point once again is just the routine of his life. Since *Taxi Driver* begins with Travis approaching a garage manager for a job, when he similarly approaches the salesman for a gun midway through the film, the event would

seem to signal the beginning of some kind of pattern of repetitions. And this is exactly what occurs.

Before Travis buys the guns, he becomes involved with a woman named Betsy (Cybill Shepherd), whom he spots entering the campaign headquarters of a presidential candidate. After observing her from a distance for some time, he one day goes into the headquarters to volunteer, and ask her out to a coffee shop on her afternoon break. Though at first amused by his directness, she soon refuses to see him any more. Exasperated, he walks into the headquarters at last to confront her and has to be thrown out by a cop. Having been rejected like this before buying the guns, Travis becomes involved with a second girl, Iris (Jodie Foster), a teenage prostitute, just after buying them. Where Betsy is a goddess from the *haut monde*, Iris is a lost soul from the *demi-monde*, a demonic reincarnation of the untouchable Betsy, even



looking vaguely like her. Buying a fifteen-minute trick with her, Travis in effect gets to know Iris the way he does Betsy, at work. But he soon tempts her out to meet him too at a coffee shop, and there also tells her, as he does Betsy, that he feels he can save her from false friends. In the person of Iris' pimp, there is even a counterpart for the candidate whom Betsy serves with such devotion.

This substitution of one woman for another is accompanied by a substitution of violence for sex. When Travis first notices Betsy, he only sits in his cab watching her through the plate-glass windows of the campaign headquarters until a colleague comes out to chase him away. After he buys the guns, he begins to stalk the candidate for whom Betsy works; and in one of the scenes establishing this, he sits in his cab around the corner from a street rally to observe him, as he had earlier watched Betsy, through the plate-glass of the building between them. Intent as Travis is on killing the politician, however, when a Secret Service man foils his attempt he simply makes Iris' pimp his target instead.

In the shoot-out at the brothel which provides the film's climax, the parallels play themselves out between Betsy and Iris, sex and violence, sanity and madness. In a scene back at the campaign headquarters, Betsy makes a bit of a fool out of a co-worker by challenging him to light a match with just two fingers—like, she says, a crippled attendant at her news-stand. Now, as Travis enters Iris' tenement, the first random bullet fired at a room clerk blows away all but the same two fingers of his outstretched hand. In a way, a perverse twist of the film's imagery like this only follows from what comes before, carrying over the same explicit but bizarre sense of detail we have seen in the documentary treatment of Travis' life. Yet, in another way, there is something new going on here. Earlier the film shows us Travis' life in a way that proposes the madness and alienation with which he sees reality. Now reality itself seems to possess such madness. As Travis at last acts out his demented fantasies, the world unaccountably begins to accommodate and conform to them.

The extent to which this is so is revealed by the aftermath of the shoot-out. Recovering from his own wounds, Travis becomes, we gather from a magazine article tacked up on his wall, something of a local hero. Then one night, months later, Betsy gets into his taxi. She speaks to him almost as if she had expected him to be the driver—as if she had now purposely sought out his cab. As he drives her home, they chat about her candidate's election chances, and briefly about what she has read of Travis in the papers. When she gets out she stands beside the taxi, seeming to have something more to say, wanting to prolong the conversation but finding herself unsure how to proceed.

Travis simply cuts her off with an easy, knowing smile and drives away. She lingers on the kerb looking after him; her posture suggests something unrequited in her attitude, and when she does finally turn to go in it is with an air of resignation. In its closing sequence, the film reintroduces a shot used frequently in the early sections—a shot of what Travis sees in the rear-vision

mirror of his cab. But in this end version of the shot, the image we see in the mirror only seems to reproduce the view of the streets we get through the windscreen behind the mirror. Since the frame of the mirror itself is inside the focal length of the camera, the contours of the mirror are blurred and indistinct. The image in the mirror now merges with the reality outside so that the two are indistinguishable. In essence, this is what happens in that penultimate scene with Betsy: Travis' dreams come true.

Like *Seven Beauties*, *Taxi Driver* ends in a way that is crucial for the film as a whole and has almost a retroactive effect on it. After the shooting and the incident with Betsy, the film turns from a taxi trip into a head trip, a fantasy of insane rage and violence that is in the end authorised by the film itself. And the hero who emerges from the ashes here is a traditional one, a figure who has his origins back in the films of the post-war period just as Wertmüller's Pasqualino does. The hero Travis incarnates is the one found in the American *film noir*. Actually, there were at first two different heroes around in that genre. One is the good hero, epitomised by the Raymond Chandler detective in films like *The Big Sleep*. He is a man who, like Travis, knows how to move through the city at night, but he is also a man who knows enough not to get involved with most women; his heroism is both defined and limited by his almost total lack of emotion. The other *noir* hero, the bad hero, is found in such adaptations of James M. Cain as *Double Indemnity* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. This man has an excess of emotion, and where the other hero's nemesis is usually some gangster, this hero's is always a woman, a blonde bitch goddess like Lana Turner in *Postman* and Barbara Stanwyck in *Double Indemnity*—or Cybill Shepherd in *Taxi Driver*.

We always have the suspicion that the bad hero is at heart the person the good hero would turn into if he ever lost his grip on himself. The one thing the two types share, explicitly in the novels and at least implicitly in the films, is that violence excites them sexually. And in a synthesis that unites the two in the early 1950s, they become someone who is essentially a psychopath. Often a cop who still possesses the capabilities of the good hero, this man is now also driven by his obsession with a woman. Whether his desire is to avenge her, as with Glenn Ford in *The Big Heat*, or to possess her, as with Cornell Wilde in *The Big Combo*, does not matter. The character Robert De Niro plays in *Taxi Driver* is an inheritor of the *film noir* hero just as surely as Pasqualino is an inheritor of the hero of neo-realism. But like Pasqualino, Travis in *Taxi Driver* transforms his heritage in critical ways.

Back in the 1950s, that third sort of *film noir* hero always had to come back to his senses to win out in the end. He must recover from his corruption into the bad hero and become the good hero again. But in *Taxi Driver*, Travis achieves the moral authority of the good hero not in spite of having been the bad hero, but *because* of having been him. Far from depriving one of such authority, turning into a psychopath now becomes a way to attain it. In the end, Travis gains what Chandler's detective had

all along, the ability to do without another human being, even the bitch goddess; and at the same time, ironically, Betsy responds to him for the first time, his capacity for violence melting her heart where nothing else could. Her new reaction to Travis at the end is proof positive that he has gained authority in the eyes of the world. Who could judge these things better than she, who even knows a future president when she sees one? In Travis, passion and alienation combine with an effectiveness we have never seen before in our movies.

Without minimising Scorsese's contribution to his own film, I think it safe to say that the film's crucial link with *film noir* is through its scriptwriter, Paul Schrader. Back in the early 1970s, Schrader wrote for *Film Comment* the best article that has been done on *film noir*. But his influence on *Taxi Driver* goes far beyond mere historical mediation. His role in the making of the film seems without doubt personal, in the sense that his personality dominates it. In an interview published recently (also in *Film Comment*), Schrader sounds at times just the way Travis looks when he is posing and practising with his guns in front of the mirror. He talks freely about how he keeps guns on hand, and when asked whether he is a 'gun hobbyist', he says it is 'more an obsession.' If Travis' point of view comes in the end to coincide with the film's own, so that it is impossible to tell apart the film-makers and the film's hero, this element of identification may have something to do with it.

The major piece of criticism Schrader did before turning to scriptwriting is a book on Ozu, Bresson and Dreyer called *Transcendental Style*. To find three of the gentlest directors in the history of movies in the background of *Taxi Driver* seems surprising. Yet it is clearly an idea in the back of Schrader's mind, and Scorsese's, that they too are making a film about religious experience. This is apparent from various allusions that *Taxi Driver* makes to Bresson—in a camera gesture that lingers, like Bresson's, at waist level, or in Travis' diet of bits of bread and apricot brandy which mimics the eucharistic diet of bread soaked in wine on which the hero of *Diary of a Country Priest* must live. Curiously, Lina Wertmüller also seems to have conceived *Seven Beauties* to be a film about religious experience. As Pasqualino is being taken to kill Francesco, the other camp inmates are standing in rows watching. And suddenly, without any signal but as if following along in some liturgy they know by heart, they all kneel. When Pasqualino shoots Francesco, the others are kneeling in the background like communicants at the consecration of the host. As the priest celebrating this mass, therefore, Pasqualino is presumably redeemed by what he does—redeemed by his act of violence, just as Travis is by his.

More important than whether these films are about religious experience, though, is the question of whether they become a religious experience for us. This is a question that returns us to the concerns with which the discussion here began, for it is basically a question about what kind of appeal these films have for us. The first appeal—the one that brings us into the theatre—is to our curiosity. We go to see *Taxi Driver* to find



'Taxi Driver': Peter Boyle (at back of group) Robert De Niro

out how the other half lives, to get the inside story on some way of life that fascinates us precisely because it is beyond our ken and we have no other access to it. At the time Scorsese made his first New York film, *Mean Streets*, he stressed in interviews that he himself grew up poor in Little Italy where the film is set. 'I've been there and I know,' was the implicit claim he seemed to be making for the authenticity of his film; and it is a claim that we can easily imagine him extending to *Taxi Driver*.

The same is true of *Seven Beauties*, whose promise is also the disclosure to us of otherwise unimaginable experiences. But the second appeal that both these films have—the one that comes after we see them and makes us glad to have done so—is of an opposite kind. It is of a kind that is, we might say, religious. Because they are made up of images like daydreams and nightmares, movies are perhaps uniquely capable of affecting us on that primitive level where religious experience occurs. Moreover, the intensity of the response to both *Taxi Driver* and *Seven Beauties* suggests that they are having just such an effect on their American audience. At the core of this experience of any movie is its ability to make us surrender our feelings to it and identify whole-heartedly with its characters. This is what *Taxi Driver* and *Seven Beauties* accomplish in the end, despite having begun by assuming the greatest possible difference between their

characters and audience. Among all the exchanges of one experience for another that occur in these films, the most remarkable is the one suffered not by their heroes, but by us. If this is indeed a religious experience, it is the most binding and fanatical kind, a conversion.

Though Schrader's book is often somewhat sophomoric, the idea seems to be that what the 'transcendental style' transcends is 'differentness'. The audience 'empathises', to use Schrader's word, with characters whose spirituality makes their experience remote from our own. I am not so sure that this is truly the style of Bresson or Ozu, but whoever's style it is, *Taxi Driver* makes a Black Mass of it. This is still not to say, though, that both these films do not accomplish something transcendent. In both cases, having gone to the theatre to see an exposé of someone else's life, we come away having got something even better: an apology for our own lives.

It seems hardly a coincidence that movie heroes who first appeared in America after World War II should be undergoing a resurgence of popularity today, in the aftermath of the Vietnam war. (Keep in mind that back in the 1940s, the neo-realist films had an impact in America perhaps even greater than in Italy.) In the last few years, violence has taken some peculiar turns in American movies and the movies Americans like. Several years ago at Sidney

Lumet's *Serpico*, for instance, I noticed that people cheered when a cop brutalises a black, and then again when a black shoots a cop. It did not seem to matter who the victim was as long as there was a victim. Kung Fu movies, with their unfamiliar social factions and obscure motivations, satisfy the same desire for a violence that is meaningless to us. So maybe does *Taxi Driver* when Travis' target changes arbitrarily from Betsy's politician to Iris' pimp.

Yet in many of the recent 'phenomenon' movies, all the violence does seem to have the same message. It is the message of *Death Wish*, and the message we get when the Indian kills McMurphy at the end of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Travis and Pasqualino may seem to come out in different places. In a way, it is as though Travis earns the kind of 'respect' that Pasqualino has at last learned not to believe in. But in truth Pasqualino and Travis are here to tell us the same thing too. This is that it is all right to have held the gun in our own hand and pulled the trigger ourselves. More than that, it is good to have done so. It affirms us somehow. Right now, this notion is obviously welcome and gives these films extraordinary power. But eventually we may end up rather ashamed to have felt this way, and rather embarrassed by movies we took to heart because they encouraged us. We shall have to wait and see. ■

IN THE



AMERICAN GRAIN

Richard Thompson

The man who wrote *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* lives quietly at the top of Laurel Canyon in a house with a small pool and two dogs. Except for his beard, Robert Getchell doesn't fit the image of a hot young screenwriter on the way up; he acts like an English Lit. professor who suddenly, rather easily, became a sought-after screenwriter. Five years ago, Getchell was teaching English at California State University ('Given the choice between teaching the poetry of Thomas Hardy and that of Sylvia Plath, I would teach Plath'). He was low on money and about to be unemployed—no Ph.D.—when he found the moment that changed his life. Offended by an unusually jelly-brained Movie of the Week, he snarled, 'I can do better than that.' During his Easter vacation, he did. ABC liked the script and almost bought it; Getchell got an agent in the process.

Impressed with the simplicity of it all, he spent ten weeks of his (permanent) summer vacation writing *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*. Six weeks later it was making money; a producer had optioned it. In orderly succession, producer David Susskind, Ellen Burstyn, Warner Brothers chief John Calley and director Martin Scorsese joined up. Getchell was nominated for an Oscar for his first script; Ellen Burstyn got one. The film dominated the British awards as well.

'Bound for Glory': David Carradine

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT GETCHELL

Getchell was invited to wrestle with *Bound for Glory*, the film about Woody Guthrie that had already defeated several screenwriters. He won, and Hal Ashby has finished shooting Getchell's version, starring David Carradine. TV beckoned, offering him \$20,000 and \$7,000 more in bonuses to do a 42-page, double-spaced script for a half-hour comedy pilot based on *Alice*, easily accomplished with the aid of a file of scenes, dialogue and notes left over from the screenplay rewrites. Not bad for someone who writes longhand, using a lucky LP as a desk.

Robert Getchell was born in Kansas City, Missouri in 1939. 'My father was a gambler, ladies' man and part-time newspaperman. We lived in everything from log cabins with dirt floors to hotel rooms in St. Paul. I never stayed in one school longer than two years in my life... As a child I breathed movies, I inhaled them. When I was small, I couldn't stand to look at people when I came out of a movie because they didn't look like they did on the screen. I didn't beg for candy; I begged for book money, but I begged harder for movie money. I saw everything...'

Did some character or situation from your own life spark *Alice*?

The script was autobiographical in the sense that my parents talked to me as an adult; verbally, they treated me as an equal. If they felt free to call me a little bastard, I felt free to call them big bastards back. But my mother never was a singer, my father never drove a Coke truck and we never took a trip across the country. That was made up. My parents did divorce about the time the father dies in the script, and I was an only child.

Why did you call the film *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*? It's such a long title.

Yes, and nobody seemed to like it. Some titles you say, 'Yes indeed! That's it!' right away, like *Lipstick*. But most titles don't work until the movie has permeated you over several viewings. I had thought of *Going Home*, but it had already been used. I thought of *Alice Hyatt's Going Home*, which didn't strike me. The third choice was *Alice Doesn't...*, and I thought not only does this flow rhythmically, but it also says it in a couple of ways. Martin Scorsese wanted to call it *Alice Steps Out*.

Sounds like a 1930s double-bill comedy.

That's the feeling he wanted.

How was *Alice* sold?

It got to a friend of a friend of my agent, who gave me a few thousand dollars for an option, which got me through a summer. That was Peter Thomas, who was then a producer. He tried for a year to get it off the ground, but ladies' vehicles were not much in demand three years ago and he didn't get it done. But he gave me money for it out of his own pocket. Then David

Susskind took a three month option—\$1,500 for three months. During that time Anne Bancroft nibbled on the script, Barbra Streisand nibbled on the script; they even sent it to Diana Ross: 'We'll make it black and we'll all be rich.' Then Peter Thomas, who first had it, said to Ellen Burstyn's agent when he walked in one day asking if anybody had a script for her, 'No, but I know where you can get one.' Sent it to her, she liked it, she told John Calley, he carried it to Martin, and Martin said yes.

What sort of film did you envisage?

I wrote *Alice* as a performer's film first, a writer's film second and a director's picture third. It happens that Martin has an incredible amount of energy and enough ability to imprint himself on virtually any work he does. So it didn't turn out quite the way I'd planned. Though meant to be first for the actress, second for me and third for the director, Martin certainly came in somewhere in the top one-and-a-half of those three, and all to the good of the picture.

Is that the set of priorities you approach most projects with—performance, writer, director?

Yes. I know movies are generally thought to be a director's medium, but for me it's always been a performer's medium. Of course, I hope a movie will have something to say; it doesn't have to be earth-shattering, but it should have some kernel of truth. Yet no one is going to care unless the actors are presenting it in a way that the audience will listen to. I think I can make them listen through language. I don't think I write literary scripts, although Martin cut one scene from *Alice* that he thought was too literary.

What does 'literary' mean here?

It was a writer's scene, where Alice first really talked to an adult man—with Kristofferson in his kitchen—which I thought was tremendously important. Martin replaced it with an improvisation, which I thought was the single worst scene in the film—although I think Martin added some other really good stuff. They improvised everything in the kitchen scene but my ending; they came back to that. I got down on my knees in Martin Scorsese's apartment and said, 'Please don't take that scene out; it's the first time she's talked to a grown person in the entire movie, and it's over in twenty minutes.' In it, she tried to tell about going to the movies in Monterey as a little girl, and how, after seeing a movie, she'd get between the street lights where no one could see her and do what Alice Faye and Betty Grable did; she tried to tell him about wanting to get back there, and about the singing, and it confused the Kristofferson character. He said, 'Well, which is it you want—to get back to the trees, or do you want to sing?' And she said, 'I want both.' So that's what I mean by literary. She tried to tell him about locust trees that bloom in a particular month; and Martin thought it was literary... But the improvisation didn't seem to bother too many people, so perhaps Martin was right.

How did you work with him after he took the project? Did you have conferences and rewrite the script?

Oh, Christ, did I rewrite the script: for Martin, and then for Martin and Ellen.



'*Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*': Ellen Burstyn, Harvey Keitel

The writer's position is not the most elevated. They said, 'Do this,' and I said 'Oh, please, please, no,' but I had to go ahead and do it. Martin could not have been more polite to me. In fact, nobody was ever rude to me, but I wasn't invited to the filming, except the small amount done here in Los Angeles. They did call every day during the rehearsal period and say 'Help us with this scene,' and I would rewrite and then dictate on the phone. I think writers make them nervous. They think we'll say, 'What are you doing? Are you changing one of my words?' And they don't want that.

Can you generalise about the kind of changes that Scorsese wanted during the first rewrite you did with him?

'*Alice*': Ellen Burstyn, Diane Ladd



Martin wanted the beginning extended. He wanted the Socorro, New Mexico portion of the movie to be one third of it. He said, 'I want everyone to think they're going to be stuck in Socorro for the rest of the movie, and then "Blammo".' Which is a good idea, but it wasn't set up that way and so he filmed a lot of stuff and had to throw it out. And it made for a very choppy ten to fifteen minutes of the movie, the weakest part.

The ending gave more problems than anything. The first draft was totally different: the boy was a suicide, it had a completely different tone—this is before Martin ever saw it. The guy who optioned it first said, 'I like this but it will never get made.' Looking back, I don't think that changing

that first ending was a compromise or an aesthetic cop-out: I hadn't prepared that character to be a suicide. So I rewrote the ending. Then, when the production was set, everybody was involved in reworking the finish. At one point, Tommy ran away to Monterey and Alice came after him. There were five versions, though basically they all *said* the same thing. But that was the problem to solve: the very ending. In one day, Martin and I cut about twelve pages out of the thing and didn't hurt it a bit; improved it, in fact. The script had swollen with everyone adding things—you can't take everybody's suggestions without developing elephantiasis.

Little attention is paid to the son's drama, which parallels Alice's own: outside their life together, each goes through a disillusioning education about the real world, being disabused of TV sitcom ideas about how life works.

I was disappointed in that reaction, or lack thereof. The script as originally conceived gave Alice and Tommy about 45 per cent each, with ten per cent going elsewhere. The movie became such a personal triumph for Ellen that reviewers tended to dismiss the boy and that parallelism.

Do you like the way the last scene is played, in the diner with everyone watching?

No, as Pauline Kael said, it was execrably staged. I wrote that rewrite with my face aflame, embarrassed, but they wouldn't take the ending I wanted: Tommy ran away; Alice didn't know where, she was frantic. He went to Monterey and she found him in the police station—which is where the police station scene came in. She said, 'OK, fine, if you're going to run away, and fight with this man I've found, I'll have to do it your way—I've got to put up with you for the next eight years. If you want it this way, we'll stay here.' And she got a job near a military installation, nobody listened to her singing, she was unhappy, Tommy was unhappy—and the kid made the decision to go back. The whole point was that this was supposed to be a compromise; it was not supposed to be the knight in denim who came and got her. Few people get to be Steve McQueen and Ali MacGraw; most people have to say, 'OK, I'll settle for that.' That's what I wanted to say, and that's why the ending as it stands now doesn't please me.

I liked that drift in the film, the awakening from the romantic dream. Did you participate in the casting?

Susskind called me to talk about the casting, and I had thought Ellen Burstyn ran away with *Last Picture Show*. She had a wonderful, sexy, whorish quality in that, and was funny in the way I imagined Alice to be. When I suggested her name, they said, 'Oh, no, we want somebody bigger than that.' Then, when she had just come out of *The Exorcist* and was hot, Warners is supposed to have told her to find a movie she wanted to do, not extremely expensive, and she could do it. So she picked the project, and the director, and was very active in the casting. I wrote Flo with an older woman in mind, someone like Maureen Stapleton or Eileen Heckart. When they cast Diane Ladd, I didn't know who she was; somehow, my original casting idea

reached her. She came over the day I saw the first rough cut and said, 'You still want Eileen Heckart for the role, honey?' I said, 'No, no ma'am.'

You had good luck with the casting of the kids.

Did I! I had a boy in mind who'd done a commercial I'd seen, but they said, 'No, we've got a boy who wants to be a stand-up comic: Alfred Lutter, III.' He walked into my office, took cigarettes from my pocket and started filling them with little explosive charges. He's much like the character of Tommy: abrasive to a degree. It's just luck they found him: he'd never done any acting before in his life.

It was unfortunate that Jodie Foster was dressed and styled with a certain androgynous quality; many people asked me if she was a boy or a girl; it pulled viewers out of the movie. But I think Audrey, the Jodie Foster part, is a very cheap character; I'm ashamed of having written her. They

got her vulgarity from her mother and passed it on to Tommy. The girl was talking to herself in a dreamy fashion, the kind of thing you say to your cat; she'd said it a hundred times. The dialogue suggestion read, 'No particular emphasis.'

I like the scene in *Alice* right after the Harvey Keitel character threatens Ellen, though it was played more broadly than I wanted. They're packing, they're hysterical, and it's funny. Right after the threat. I can't envisage writing a movie without that mixture of serious and humorous material.

Do you work with the idea of genre, perhaps as a set of conventions you can use interestingly?

Alice could fit into the road movie genre, the woman's vehicle genre, several more. I use those quite consciously. I set out to write a vehicle for a woman. That's one of the things I wanted to do: not the most important, but one of them. Second, I wanted to remind people of how children



'Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore': Ellen Burstyn, Kris Kristofferson

told me to get Tommy outside, do something with him. That character just came right off a duck's back, just fell off the pen. It was easy to write and the audience laughed, but every time I see her in the movie I want to hide. Tommy's vulgarity came from Alice, so I don't think any vulgarity from those two that caused laughter was false. But just to stick in another child who talks like that was cheap and easy—a false note.

What about the role of humour in your scripts?

Humour is very important: I think it's one of the reasons *Alice* was a success. I started off the movie with Alice as a little girl. I had wanted her to be carrying a chicken, not a doll, stroking it, walking down the road, a lonely little girl on a farm. She was not supposed to give the line, 'And if anyone doesn't like it they can blow it out their ass' with such explosive violence; it was to have been a litany. I also had her mother saying, 'Alice, get in here or I'm just going to beat the living ass off you, you hear me?' But she didn't mean it, it's just a catch phrase, so you get the idea that Alice

talk. They don't talk like children, they talk like people, especially when they're twelve or thirteen and have any intelligence at all. I've never really seen anyone scream at a child on screen—I had that in mind when I wrote the scene in which Alice turns to Tommy, drags him across the room, throws him into a chair, and says 'Write it all down, all of your problems. I'm trying to earn some money, I've just spent too much on a dress...' She just erupts at him. This happens, but I don't recall seeing it in movies. I wrote *Alice* before the other road movies came out—*Rafferty and the Gold Dust Twins*, *Harry and Tonto*—of course, they were probably being written at the same time. I think a road movie is easier to do. If you're not successful with what you're doing right there in the script, you jump in the car and move on. You excuse yourself from having to evoke a full sense of place and situation.

How did you feel about doing *Alice* as a TV series, or pilot? How do you choose what to draw on from the original?

When David Susskind approached me, I said, 'No. If I do this, people will think I

have to do television and I won't be able to do movies.' My agent said: 'Ridiculous, you'll be doing it for the money.' Not to sound crass, but if one creates a successful TV series, one becomes financially independent. So, finally, I didn't feel I could say no. We're drawing on the funniest part, the diner: we start with them down and out in Phoenix. Alice's plan to get to California has been aborted. The studio people want me to play that down; they don't want her unhappy, everything must be upbeat. Writing the pilot, I found myself writing in, before Alice's lines, 'Not really mad', or 'Just passing time'—all these disclaimers to get the network people to buy it; and they bought it. It'll be made with a New York actress, Linda Lavin—she does Neil Simon stuff, a talented woman who can take lines that aren't very good and burnish them up so they look like something.

Pilots are incredible; you have to do what they call the eighth episode, not the

director. Gently but firmly, he kept dragging me back to the book and having me insert scenes from it. Finally, I told him, 'I don't think that happened; I think Woody lied that time.' And he finally accepted my ideas, which pleased me. He did change the dialogue—which I pride myself on—and on the page, characters now tend to sound like the Beverly Hillbillies: 'Ah duhclare, ah don't thaynk ah evuh did see sech a hunka meat...' The actors will probably take care of that; from what filming I saw, they did. You don't write dialect, you write cadences, then leave it to the actors.

Did you have to fashion a narrative apart from the book, or was it structured there for you?

No, it wasn't. The other three scripts (although I didn't read them—I was afraid to be locked into something too easily, to be blinkered) tried to cover twenty-five years of his life and put in four hundred

at a time. He also had a great deal of charm. I tried to show that, and at the same time show that he was a prick. I think they toned down the prickiness some.

How did they cast the film?

The script was set when Woody was 23; he was a short man. So they wanted a short, wiry 23-year-old. Bob De Niro was busy for the next eight years. Dustin Hoffman said, 'Yes, I will do it, but I want three months to rest and three months to learn to play the guitar better...' He was going to delay it almost a year, so they said thank you, no. Several young singers were considered. Then David Carradine came in, and Hal said: 'If he were six inches shorter, I'd hire him on the spot. I don't care how old he is [around 38].' Eventually he brought David in not so much for a test as to sit around with the guitar and sing and talk in Hal's office with the camera on. Hal called in the United Artists people, who came to jeer and stayed to cheer. And that's how David got cast. It's not an obvious choice, you will admit.

Bound for Glory obviously has a political dimension. Whether or not you're a political person, did you work to make it a political film? Do you see it fitting into the cycle of the past few years which includes Joe Hill and Sacco and Vanzetti, and more tangential use of political figures like Boxcar Bertha or Dillinger?

You can't work with Woody Guthrie and not have it turn out a political film to some degree; however, I hope the movie is not going to be a polemic. I loathe tracts which masquerade as movies. This story is about a man in his formative years. I've tried to show him as a *tabula rasa* when the film starts; during those four years, he goes into the oven and is formed. Though I'm not a violently political person, I am in sympathy with Woody's political proclivities. He was never a Communist *per se*. I don't think he ever joined anything; he disliked organisations—except for his work with unionism—and he wasn't a joiner of political parties. He distrusted them and stayed away from them, and so did I for the movie.

He went to migrant camps and put on impromptu shows, saying, 'What the hell are you doing? Picking fruit at 4 cents a bushel—does that make sense? Stop and think about it.' The *Grapes of Wrath* thing. Oddly enough, David Carradine plays a character not unlike the one his father played in *Grapes of Wrath*: the preacher who couldn't preach any more because he found out that he didn't know it all, and that he had to go around and learn more and teach people what he learned.

Do you work with Guthrie's relation to the media, his use of it, its operation on him?

Yes. He has a radio programme and wants to sing a leftist ballad he wrote called 'Pretty Boy Floyd', and the station owners tell him, 'No more message songs, no more dedications to the pickers out there, or you walk.' He put up with it for a while, then he couldn't and left. He turned down all sorts of opportunities at that time in his life to leave and say the hell with it; I'll go somewhere else... Woody was a failure at everything he tried: relationships, marriages, parenthood, music—



Echoes of 'The Grapes of Wrath' in 'Bound for Glory'

first. You do not introduce anyone, you start it as if the characters had always been there and had always known one another. You can't use any exposition. You can only have a certain number of major characters. The tag—the epilogue at the end of the show—has to be exactly one and a half pages... If it works, we'll all make money and I won't have to be involved with it ever again.

On Bound for Glory, did you work closely with the Woody Guthrie book?

I did what amounts to an original. I heard that the three earlier scripts stayed very close to the book. But the book covers twenty-five or thirty years, and it's specious in certain parts, so I avoided those spots. I certainly don't mean to down Woody Guthrie, but he was constantly adjusting his crown of thorns. I thought this smacked of smugness; a lot of the book did. And, wherever I thought he was lying, I ran like crazy. I made up all the people except Woody and his first wife.

Then Hal Ashby came on the project. He's always been known as a good director, and since *Shampoo* as a good, powerful

songs. I chose to focus on three or four formative years when he developed political and social awareness and began to use his talent as a weapon. The movie begins down and out in Oklahoma, moves through Los Angeles and the failure of his first marriage, and ends with his real birth when he goes to New York and becomes more involved with leftist politics.

Was there any pressure to have his son, Arlo, play the part?

No pressure. Arlo was talked about, but everyone thought it would be too inbred. For the same reason, though Arthur Penn was the first director it was submitted to, I said, 'Don't give it to Penn, he's already done *Alice's Restaurant*.' He turned it down with no comment, and the second person was Hal Ashby, who was my first choice. I think Ashby has energy and respect for the written word. He's wonderful with performers. I was disappointed, though, when Hal cut down a long speech I'd given to an actress, a speech that made Woody look particularly ugly. He was a wench, a drinker, he'd walk out of the door, disappear and leave his wife and babies for months

he wrote over a thousand songs... came up with maybe ten or twelve good ones, so in that particular sense he was a success. But he was never able to make any of these goals or abilities cohere. The main thing he worked on was trying to help other people.

What are you working on now?

It's *The Collector* in reverse, more or less: *Main Event*. It's spatially limited, but not claustrophobic; the last half of the movie is set in one house, and half of that in the basement.

What's it about?

Conflict. Wouldn't you go to see a movie if an ad showed you a young George C. Scott reaching through bars to grab Faye Dunaway or Jane Fonda by the hair, in a basement...? It's about two fantastic people, a female prison psychologist who has very advanced ideas on prisoner rehabilitation, i.e., brainwashing, 'thought reform', as she puts it. The other is a beast, a killer, a rapist, a sodomist, an all-round misfit who meets this psychologist in prison. She wants to use him in an experiment, the authorities turn her down, then she's fired for sleeping with a prisoner out on furlough. Then our hero, the beast, breaks out of prison, gets into her apartment, rapes her. She manages to trick him and takes him at gunpoint to her ex-husband's house in the country, puts him in the basement and starts to try to make a new human being. They almost do each other in... I have big hopes for it, but will audiences buy the concept of thought reform?

They bought *Clockwork Orange*.

True, but *Clockwork Orange* had toys—technical gimmicks. This, on the other hand, is totally within the realm of psychological realism. I'd like someone like a younger George C. Scott. Someone suggested I give it to Charles Bronson, if I wanted to make money. I want to stay away from the very strong ladies for this; I wouldn't want Glenda Jackson, even without the accent. What I'd like is a small-statured woman; I thought of Genevieve Bujold or Faye Dunaway. The project has been taken to a producer at Universal to see if he likes it; and I'm waiting to see whether the whole thing lives or dies.

Did any film or group of films or writers prove useful to you as models when you began to work on screenplays?

I didn't use anyone as a guide, really. I revere writers who are good with dialogue: Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee. Those two cannot write an unsayable line as far as I know; the words speak themselves, and the actors have the easiest job imaginable. The fiction school that moulded me most was the Southern grotesques—Flannery O'Connor, Carson McCullers, sometimes Faulkner, Truman Capote. I've never really gotten over them.

I didn't know how to put together a script physically, so I asked the man who became my agent to give me a couple of scripts. I looked at them and thought, so that's how it's done; it looks easy enough. I don't believe in a screenwriter going heavily into camera angles. It irritates me when I read it, and I'm not even a director,

so I can guess how the director must feel. I concentrate on the attitude of the characters and on dialogue reading, which I think makes my scripts eminently readable—and which I think is one of the reasons they've given me money for them. And there were scenes that came as I wrote *Alice* that I laughed at; I thought if I could make myself laugh while I sat there, I had a chance to get the thing made.

Do you find yourself relating to the tradition of American realism?

I'm definitely in the American grain, William Carlos Williams notwithstanding. I wouldn't bother to construct a world when we've already got one. I feel limited not only to an American grain but to a particular locale, Midwest-West. But I'm trying to stretch that particular limitation. Even working back into the 1930s for *Bound for Glory* worried me. But I know Thirties music well, and I do know the area—Texas, Arkansas, California... I don't think I could write a good costume picture.

Are there qualities unique to films of our decade?

Excess of various kinds; Visconti, in other words. We have everything now, only exaggerated. Haven't we seen *Taxi Driver* before, with Arthur Franz and his rifle, and Bobby Driscoll at the window? Only now we see what really happens when an assassin shoots someone.

Why did you choose screenwriting?

Screenwriting is simply easier than writing a novel, or than writing poetry. I'd written short stories, book reviews; they're harder. In movies, you worry about construction and character, but basically your tool is dialogue, and that's the easiest thing for me. I wrote the paperback tie-in of *Alice* because they said, 'We'll give you \$10,000 if you write 60,000 words.' Tony Bill said, 'Do not spend any time on it because no one reads those things. Just dash it off.' I thought, 'Nevertheless, I'm going to do this little jewel that somebody's going to find some day and write a piece on.' So I sat down and I worked for a day. And hard? I mean, every sentence I was working over. And then I sat down next day with my script and did final copy, one draft. If I made a mistake, I erased and corrected it. I did it in eleven days. No one read it. No one knows I did it; they haven't noticed it.

How should beginners approach the industry?

Get an agent, take your work around. No: what I did was write a screenplay, *Alice*, that I thought was good. My agent didn't care for it for various reasons, so I took the initiative and sent it directly to the star it suited, Shirley MacLaine. She called back, I said, 'This is simple.' And it almost worked out that way; certainly worth trying. But don't write a treatment, no matter what they tell you. Treatments are a bastardised form at best and no one likes reading them—or writing them. Do a whole script, or even half or a third of a script; someone may give you a few thousand dollars to complete the thing.

What would you like audiences to come away from a Getchell film with?

Some bit of truth or enjoyment; come away having thought or felt something.

Thought and pleasure combined. I want people to be elated by my movies; I want them to be *lifted* in some way. If *Main Event* gets done, I want them to be so frightened by what goes on that they'll come out saying 'My God!' Or, if they see *Alice*, to say, 'Yes, indeed, I believe her. I don't know anything about her, I come from New York and have never been to New Mexico, but I believe that's what it's like, and the truth of it brought me up.' I think movies are evaluated partially on visceral effect. Then, did he tell the truth or did he lie? Then, did he do it well? Then, after that, did he do it beautifully? Those three things.

What's the role of beauty in a film for you? Would it be a beauty of words?

Words, and I'm actor-fixated. I count on the actor to bring out the honesty of the script. I worry about this because I know that my fourth script, which I plan to direct, is going to be a star-making role for the male lead. Should I be clever, like Altman, or Truffaut, or Hal Prince and Steven Sondheim, and subordinate actors to the whole, and the whole is mine? But for me the whole is expressed through people, so I've got to subordinate myself as writer and director to the people in it. Writing is something I can do, but I'm not a writer in the sense that I am driven to it. I'm five times more a director than a writer.

I spend as much time as I can watching old movies, inspired by stories of Orson Welles being taught everything there was to know about cinematography by Gregg Toland in one afternoon, or whatever it was. But he was Orson Welles, and I am I. There are degrees of failure; I might fail at being Welles, but I might also succeed at turning out something good in a different way. Visuals are my weak point. What I hope to do is dazzle them with words and people, and nobody will know—for a while. I'll forgive anything if a director can take an actor and get something out of him that's never been got before and probably won't be got again. That's what Cukor did many times. That's what I'm hoping will tide me over—if I get the chance.

Are there things in your scripts that you perceive as Getchell touches—approaches to scenes, stylistic devices?

Anything scatological that you ever see in a film that I have anything to do with is me. My movies will always be centred on no more than three people, at the outside. I don't like to scatter myself or my gems, I like to keep them for the few. And no long speeches: give-and-take dialogue, I'm not given to monologue. And I like repressed violence that breaks out maybe once in a movie. But to build a whole movie around... I'm not sure how I feel about *Taxi Driver* yet; I wonder, in a base part of me, if the whole movie weren't done for the purpose of that ending.

I'm curious about what television may have suggested to you, or whether you're even involved in watching much TV?

I have no shame. I will watch anything that flickers, anything that moves: anything. If I want to kill a day, I can watch *All My Children*. I can watch the game shows—I like people, real people. ■

THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH

Tom Milne



'The key motif through the first part . . . is the railway'

A stranger in a strange land, Thomas Jerome Newton (David Bowie) undergoes, like all Nicolas Roeg's heroes, a personality change in which he is got at, taken over, transformed into an other.

In the novel *The Man Who Fell to Earth* by Walter Tevis, this visitor from outer space had a clearly defined purpose: to bring the survivors from his own drought-stricken planet to Earth's Eden, and once there, to save us earthlings from making the same self-destructive errors as his people did. In Paul Mayersberg's script, this purpose is deliberately withdrawn, not so much in its overall implications (although the messianic element is very much toned down) as in its detail. Invited to work on Newton's research project, for instance, Dr. Bryce (Rip Torn) is instructed to concern himself with problems of fuel conservation, but finds himself worried about the recovery programme. 'Don't be,' says Newton flatly, and no elucidation is forthcoming. A line or two of dialogue from the novel would have sufficed to explain that the Antheans have space ships but no fuel, and that Newton's mission is simply to rectify this lack. Judging this, like so many other matters of plot detail, to be irrelevant to the theme they have elaborated from the book, Mayersberg and Roeg prefer not to explain.

The result, not unpredictably, has been a fairly general charge of mystification. Whether couched in terms of chic dismissal (John Coleman, Russell Davies), guarded appreciation (David Robinson) or somewhat baffled enthusiasm (Dilys Powell), the common denominator of critical opinion seems to have been that 'The problem with *The Man Who Fell to Earth* is that it

contains enough ideas for six different films: and far too many, in my opinion, for one' (Nigel Andrews, *Financial Times*). The problem is perhaps added to by the fact that the equally mystificatory metamorphoses of *Performance*, *Walkabout* and *Don't Look Now* occurred in areas of clear definition (further defined by the way essentially ordinary people grew increas-

ingly aware of specifically alien cultures: the Übermensch, the aborigine, the clairvoyant). Newton, on the other hand, is an alien coping with a familiar culture (ours), and as he is gradually forced to integrate, to become like us, a sense of disorientation necessarily accompanies the fact that *we*, simultaneously, have become *him*.

There are more ways than one of stroking a cat, however. And the way to tame *The Man Who Fell to Earth* is not by trying to perceive an intellectual logic which isn't there, but by following the tangential, emotional continuity that orders its ideas into a tightly woven structure which becomes an astonishingly literal illustration of Marvell's conceit: 'As lines, so loves oblique, may well/Themselves in every angle greet/But ours so truly parallel/Though infinite, can never meet.'

One point on which the critics are unanimous is in finding David Bowie entirely convincing as a visitor from another planet. Since no one could reasonably be expected to recognise an extra-terrestrial, what this means is that Bowie's presence and performance suggest qualities that are recognised as common denominators of difference, of alienness, of—in fact—non-humanness. There is, naturally, his bright

orange hair. More particularly, however, a composite picture emerges of vulnerability: 'ethereal, pale, enigmatic features', 'slight, fearful facial tremors', 'frail body', 'gaunt, sad and dignified', 'a person ill-equipped to cope with the rigours of life on our particular planet.' What is significant about this reaction is that vulnerability and those attributes commonly associated with it (shyness, gentleness, hesitancy, tenderness) are readily accepted as being non-human qualities. The attitude, of course, is cunningly implanted by the film itself in its juxtaposition of Newton's defencelessness with the tough protective shells adopted ('to cope with the rigours of life . . .') by the three humans who, through their intimate association with him, gradually rediscover something of that vulnerability: Farnsworth (Buck Henry) and his pebble-eyed greed, Bryce's cynical indifference, Mary Lou (Candy Clark) and her drunken, bovine resignation.

Echoing—or rather, supporting—this seesaw relationship whereby, as Newton becomes 'human' in spite of himself, the other three become progressively more (shall we say?) 'unhuman', is a suggestion that the relationship is occasioned by the momentary coincidence of two parallel worlds. Behind the story of the Anthean's arrival on Earth there is, clearly, another story of a society's evolution through technological sophistication to a self-destruction that has left it hesitant, defenceless, stripped of its arrogance, rather in the position of primitive man fighting desperately for survival. Ironically, the man who falls to earth in search of paradise finds Man (only a stage or two behind in the auto-destruct process) abandoning that paradise to reach for the stars. Small wonder, beyond the joke of his neglect of the Latin language, that Newton remains struck dumb when confronted by the motto 'Per ardua ad astra'.

A sense of desolation and disaster is established from the outset by the dying landscape that meets Newton's eyes: the decaying wooden structure by the lake; the old railway engine lying wreathed in weeds; the deserted highway with one solitary car speeding furtively past; the abandoned blow-up advertising kiosk; the old wino croaking like some weird mutant from his lair. Almost immediately, however, the image is turned upside-down by the incredibly wrinkled old woman in the jewellery store, clothed in an exotic plumage of enamelled bracelets, necklaces and pendants that takes one far back into America's Indian past. The quaint old woman, the Louis Armstrong record on the soundtrack, the Old Curiosity Shop atmosphere, all suggest a comfortingly nostalgic familiarity. Yet nestling among the bric-à-brac displayed for the serendipity-minded, the store also offers a row of gleaming portable television sets. Is this small New Mexico town a backwater trying hard to catch up, or has it left us far behind?

It is as though Newton's arrival, Newton's eye on our world, had upset the time machine—those clocks that suddenly tick so manically, racing into a triumphant peal of alarms and bells as he is finally freed, spent and useless, from his prison—for a truce in which to consider the future. Real connection comes only once, in the momen-



'Incarceration, the end of the line . . .' David Bowie as Newton

tary encounter between two kinds of innocence when the pioneer family by the roadside see what man has become, and Newton sees what man once was. But—as disturbing as the restless switch from genre to genre (mystery, spy, private eye, Western, science fiction, romance, documentary) which simultaneously presents a kind of history of America and prevents one from drawing the expected conclusions—the dislocation in time functions throughout as a subtle intimation of connections missed (the two *Persona* shots of Newton and Mary Lou/Newton's wife staring at each other, then bleakly out at the camera, as the 'love' between Newton and Mary Lou reaches, simultaneously, its peak of tenderness and of dishonesty), or occasionally, unavailingly made. Farnsworth, for instance, literally foretells his own death when he says, immediately after being hired by Newton, 'When Mr. Newton came into my apartment, my life went straight out the window.' (That apartment, one might note, like so many of the settings in the film, strikes a curiously ambivalent note: a Victorian den tarted up into an Ideal Home exhibit.)

The key motif through the first part of the film, resuming all the adumbrated themes (journeys, brief encounters, connections sought and missed, parallel lines) is the railway. When we first see Newton, the old steam locomotive he passes is clearly derelict, yet on the soundtrack we hear the steady, rhythmic chugging of a train, as though he had miraculously persuaded it to move again; and this impression is reinforced by the same noise off, only faster, more urgent, as Mary Lou carries him to his hotel room in Artesia after his fateful encounter with her in the lift. 'They always seem to lead such interesting lives, people who travel. Maybe, some day . . .' says Mary Lou's voice-off wistfully as she walks out of the hotel and towards the railway lines after getting him settled. A little later, from the window of this room, Newton stares at a train moving slowly over

a level crossing (the shot almost exactly matching, with an unnerving sense of breaching a time-jump, the one of a vast construction site outside Farnsworth's office in the preceding sequence), and murmurs, 'They're so strange here, the trains.' Very pertinently, this shot of Newton at the window is preceded by glimpses of Billy Wilder's *Love in the Afternoon* as seen on one of his multiple TV sets, notably a scene in which Gary Cooper is warning Audrey Hepburn of the dangers of emotional involvement, and another in which he sweeps her into his arms while Wilder's camera turns ironically to the violinist providing an ecstatic romantic accompaniment. 'When you look out there at night,' murmurs the wistful Mary Lou, 'don't you feel that somewhere there's gotta be a God? There's gotta be!'

Here the train motif draws near to its conclusion, with Mary Lou deifying love, while Newton himself has perceived the dangers of involvement in an encounter doomed to end as yet another missed connection. At this point Mary Lou, helpless and hopeless, the small town floozie drowning her grey future in drink and churchgoing, has a hesitant vulnerability already disappearing as she asserts her demands on and domination over Newton. It is this vulnerability more than anything, one feels, that inspires Newton to ask her to go with him. There is one more train, this time a glittering, anonymous electric express hurtling by as their car waits at a level crossing. Newton is not interested, even when Mary Lou draws his attention to it; and it is left to her, in a long and rambling anecdote about the days from her childhood when trains were cosy and friendly and full of people, to express his foreboding intuition of emptiness. He knows already, as she is soon to prove, that she can connect only with what he *seems*, not with what he *is*.

The motif for the second half of the film is incarceration, the end of the line. Newton



'Helpless and hopeless . . .' Candy Clark as Mary Lou

and the three humans he has affected—made human by breaking through to their capacity for faith, in themselves or in others—retreat into seclusion: Bryce and Mary Lou in the two houses facing each other on opposite sides of the lake (and irresistibly recalling *Gatsby* and *Daisy*: 'You always have a green light that burns all night at the end of your dock'); Newton in the tumble-down shack in the desert; Farnsworth in the apartment whose shelter he is reluctant to leave (his killers have to heave him twice at the window before it gives way). Although never more than two of the four ever meet at any one time, they are all indissolubly linked together by association. By the ginger cat in Newton's room near the beginning, the (same?) ginger cat in the apartment shared by Bryce and Mary Lou at the end, the portrait of a cat with the

Anthean's eyes that hangs over Farnsworth's desk. Or, more elusively, by Bryce's sudden hesitation on the pier as he arrives for his first encounter with Newton: he has just passed a hanging paper mobile whose form echoes the glass chandelier in Farnsworth's apartment, and foreshadows the form of the candles which Mary Lou lights at the end of her last, frenzied love-making with Newton. (Or possibly it is the weird hint of oriental pagoda lent to Newton's house by the wooden structure in front of it that makes Bryce hesitate; a touch of playful fantasy aligned with the childhood nostalgia omnipresent in the film: the dark tower with three gateways—the magic choice—leading to the research establishment, the womb-like interior of the space ship, the gingerbread house on Anthea, and of course the frustrated maternal and

paternal instincts, respectively, of Mary Lou and Bryce.)

Of this quartet, this maquis drawn together to resist, Farnsworth dies for the cause (albeit attempting to renege), Bryce and Mary Lou become collaborators, and only Newton is literally incarcerated: in the weird suite of rooms so strangely reminiscent of the one at the end of *2001*, but which is less an oasis of rebirth than a repository for the forgotten, decaying elegance of the past, in which even the grass has been reduced to a green baize memory and the trees to a mural decoration. This place is on the one hand a totalitarian torture chamber in which Newton is 'persuaded' to conform, to welcome those images of the human imagination that batter him from his TV sets, a distillation of brutish sex and violence from countless movies that he has tried to block out of his mind. And on the other, a refuge, an ivory tower in which Newton finally merges with the other movie and literary heroes whose adventures are fleetingly evoked and who also retired in despair to their Xanadus: Charles Foster Kane, Jay Gatsby, Clare Quilty of *Lolita*. There, gravely watched over by the silent, bearded man who may be one of the other 'Visitors' he spoke of or one of his tormentors (in either case tacitly acknowledging that no more need be expected of him), Newton, too, cherishes his Rosebud, mourns his Daisy, and awaits death. Which death, since the Anthean has now become fully humanised, is by implication the death of the human race.

The Man Who Fell to Earth does not, of course, end with a sci-fi vision of destruction; but it achieves the same effect of desolation as Newton slowly bows his head, leaving us staring at the crown of his hat like a sun that may never rise again. Having come to Earth in search of hope, he finds only the self-destruction he has already witnessed well under way again; and by a curious osmosis, the futility of his space odyssey becomes our own dangerous folly in attempting to reach, per ardua, ad astra. This process of transference is started at the very beginning of the film by the deliberate inversion of viewpoints as the Anthean arrives on Earth. Since his space craft evidently plummeted into a lake surrounded by hills, one expects to see him climbing upwards; instead he is seen, apparently from lake-level, coming down a hill. Immediately we find ourselves standing where he was, alongside a silently watching figure, as the Anthean now walks past the camera's previous position. Who, in other words, is the observer and who the observed?

A hint is perhaps offered in the overhead shot of Newton's face as he lies down on the bench outside the jewellery store to wait for it to open. The effect, as the camera lifts away from the face, is of a rocket take-off in which we see the slowly receding Earth with new eyes, naked and defenceless. The trajectory of this rocket takes us on a voyage of discovery from familiar backwoods to distant space . . . or from 'Blueberry Hill' to 'Stardust'. And as the old favourites by Louis Armstrong and Artie Shaw which enclose this journey suggest, it is essentially one of nostalgia: the world we discover is the world we have lost.



'Even the trees have been reduced to a mural decoration . . .'



Left: 'Die Marquise von O';
below: 'Private Vices, Public Virtues'

CANNES 76



In a shop window next door to the Festival Palais there's a poster from the 1930s on display. Wistfully elegant, it advertises the first Cannes Festival—the one that never happened. The advertised opening date: September 1st, 1939. But Cannes' actual thirtieth birthday celebrations (it started up very promptly indeed, in 1946) were conducted not with elegance but with some apprehension. 'Cannes suffocated by success,' said a *Figaro* headline, the article going on to claim, alarmingly enough, that the Festival now rates as 'the biggest international attraction after the Olympics.' 40,000 visitors; 1,700 journalists; nearly 500 films: the statistics of overkill.

The beginning of the mass overcrowding

really dates from 1968, and the Festival's reasoned decision to accommodate potential 'counter-culture' rivals, and then to strengthen itself so as not to risk being overshadowed by them. But the big, indispensable jamboree has reached a point where the convergence of the world's film businessmen, the film press and much of the local tourist traffic is stretching facilities to the edge of tolerance. The embattled organisers asked for 'a minimum of discipline, you might say of courtesy, from festival participants'—don't, in other words, actually try to break down the doors getting into the cinema. But, as with the Olympics, it's easier to say that the scale should be reduced than practically to see how anyone

can do it. The Mediterranean looks on, cynically blue; by 1980, at this rate, they'll have only the water left to walk on.

One director who didn't contribute to the crowding was Eric Rohmer. Courteously announcing that he really couldn't face it, Rohmer stayed away but sent his film, the perfect, cool antidote to the overheated pressures. **Die Marquise von O**, representing Germany, is his first period film and his first in a foreign language; but from the opening images there's no question that the director has returned in top form. Kleist's novel, published in 1808, concerns a virtuous young widow who finds herself mysteriously pregnant and finally takes the extreme course of advertising in the local press, asking the man responsible please to identify himself. To no one's surprise, he is finally discovered, after tearful imbroglios and parental tantrums, to be the Russian count who rescued her from the ruder attentions of his soldiery during an assault on the citadel commanded by her father. The playing (Edith Clever and Bruno Ganz as the protagonists, Edda Seippel as the girl's mother) is beautifully shaded and coordinated, and the same unflinching finesse extends to Nestor Almendros' camerawork and the re-creation not of 'period' but of settings to live in. At the opening, the count leaps on to the parapet, a hero bathed in blazing light; the masterly exaggeration is counterpoint to an objective irony which brings out all the comedy of the story without ever compromising or modernising its view of the sentiments of the period. Rohmer's control of tone, never more in evidence, is partly a matter of artistic discretion; his meticulously lucid and human film is a 'conte moral' in its own right, made in perfect sympathy with the original text.

After Rohmer, Rosi, whose **Cadaveri Eccellenti** is a genuinely heavyweight (not overweight) political thriller, moving implacably towards the discovery of conspiracy at the centres of power. Lino Ventura, a melancholy Maigret in a white raincoat, is the police inspector given the job of investigating a series of murders of judges in Southern Italy. Asking questions, scanning photographic evidence, visiting the scenes of crimes, he identifies the original assassin, then takes a step further, into the area of conspiracy which leads to his own death, shot down under the austere gaze of statues from the classical past. The film is not 'realistic' (one reason, Rosi says, why he cast so many foreign actors, including Max von Sydow, Charles Vanel and Alain Cuny, all excellent); its many locations, brilliantly chosen and as brilliantly shot by Pasqualino De Santis, are selected to give a heightened atmospheric sense, a suggestion of the relation between the confidence of the past, when the institutions were fixed and seemed firm, and the apprehensions of the present. Continually moving forward, along the usual forceful Rosi trajectory, the film fills out its own scale, not as an expression of fashionable paranoia but as a more deeply pessimistic but also more bracingly enquiring study. 'The truth is not always revolutionary,' is the film's last line, spoken by a Communist.

For Bertolucci, the truth is revolutionary. As everyone knows, his **1900** lasts five and a half hours, and follows the fate of two boys, the sons of landowner and peasant, born on the same day in the new century. The scale is that of a 19th century novel (Bertolucci as Victor Hugo), and early scenes are drenched in feeling for the beauty and richness of the countryside near Parma where the director grew up; the main setting, a vast farm courtyard, is a thing of beauty. Gradually, however, a kind of implacable naïveté of political sentiment takes over. The propertied classes are inevitably decadent (Bertolucci is most at home here, including the portrayal of Dominique Sanda's progression from bright young thing of the 1920s to solitary toper of the 1940s); the local Fascisti are represented by Donald Sutherland and Laura Betti, both playing devilment to the hilt and beyond, including child-murder; the peasantry, often picturesquely wizened, emerge in 1945 into a vision of a revolutionary Utopia, cavorting under a vast red flag. It's ironic, certainly, that a film with such a conclusion should be financed by the full capitalist might of Hollywood; and rather more ironic that the Italian Communist Party is said to find Bertolucci's red flag waving something of an embarrassment. Artistically, such simple didactic schematism doesn't contain the family chronicle sprawl, the obesity of a film in which history becomes declamation.

The third of the big Italian films in the Palais, Visconti's **L'Innocente**, is a worthy grace note to a career of formidable distinction and courage, if not the post-humous masterpiece one might rather unreasonably have hoped for. Based on a novel by D'Annunzio, it concerns a man who expects his wife to tolerate his mistress, but gets a fierce shock when the wife acquires first a lover and then a child. While the household is at church at Christmas, he lets the baby die of cold, an act of willed ferocity on the route to self-destruction. Shot (again by the versatile De Santis) largely in ostentatiously handsome and heavy interiors of the turn of the century, the film has an enclosed, slow-paced, brooding distinction, and all Visconti's emphasis on the emotional décor of the past. Giancarlo Giannini, however, is not quite the actor to carry the central part; one watches with respectful detachment.

From Joseph Losey, temporarily established in France, comes **Mr. Klein**, a story which must have appealed to him for its multiple ironies, but which he has turned into a film plumped out with overweight. An art dealer (Alain Delon) in the Paris of 1942 one day receives through the post a Jewish newsletter; it seems that there is another Mr. Klein, a Jew, hovering dangerously on the periphery of his complacent life. Delon follows the elusive trail, in a kind of metaphysical detective story which can only lead towards the final takeover of his identity; at the end, caught in the Paris round-up of the Jews, he's gazing at us through the bars of a cattle-truck bound for Germany—a fate, the film suggests, which is also in some sense a punishment for the indifference and sharp detachment of his temperament. Enigmatic encounters, including a splendid one with Jeanne Moreau, and a careful shading of



'Sérail': Corin Redgrave, Leslie Caron

settings, from the bleakly realistic to the almost dreamlike, give the film a distinction of surface. But Losey talks of aiming for 'the unrelenting fascination of a Borges labyrinth'; and if he has failed to achieve this, it's perhaps because he is also too careful, too evidently constructing scaffolding for the maze and pointing the spectator in the significant direction rather than letting him loose in it.

Jacques Rivette's **Duelle** (formerly *Viva*) is more genuinely labyrinthine, a tale of a great jewel of mysterious powers, goddesses of night (Juliet Berto) and day (Bulle Ogier), mortals who damagingly involve themselves with these fates, and a movie landscape in which the references—Cocteau, *film noir*, a Wellesian aquarium—ricochet off each other. I'm at a disadvantage in not having yet caught up with *Céline et Julie*: with a director like Rivette, who is following a line of very conscious development through a hermetic kind of submarine world, it's vital not to lose a link in the chain. *Duelle* is a riveting exercise in *mise en scène*, the versatile power of the tracking camera, the force of personality of players meeting mostly at tangents. Tentatively (since the film certainly demands a second look), one also suggests that the script is not quite up to its job.

The Rivette team are out in force again in **Sérail**, the first film directed by *Duelle*'s co-writer Eduardo de Gregorio, who also scripted *The Spider's Strategy*. A haunted house story, about an English writer (Corin Redgrave) who acquires a rambling, derelict chateau inhabited by two masquerading girls (Bulle Ogier, Marie-France Pisier) and a forceful housekeeper (Leslie Caron), the film is stuffed with predictable allusions—Rivette, Cocteau, Resnais, Borges, Wilkie Collins, etc. But it's done with a style which manages to absorb the references, and that particular impish irony which is evidently part of de Gregorio's Argentinian inheritance. The novelist's reflections on the spider's web of feminine hocus-pocus laid out to trap him are amused; but he still falls into the seraglio. And along with its elaborate apparatus of deception and illusion, *Sérail* has a reassuring practicality

—Leslie Caron's cooking and gardening, of which agreeably much is made.

De Gregorio gets his ideas, familiar though they may be, into focus; Peter Weir, whose **Picnic at Hanging Rock** also deals in the landscape of supernatural mystery, finally lets his film wander disjointedly. The first half is concentrated evocation: a staid girls' school in the Australia of 1900, a projected picnic outing, and the transition to the hot, hazy, dangerously beautiful setting of Hanging Rock, where Pan pipes tootle, watches stop, and four of the picnickers mysteriously vanish. There's no answer to the puzzle, though the film is prodigal with hints and evasions; and in the second half, Weir involves himself with too many characters—a lonely girl, a young Englishman, Rachel Roberts' hard-drinking headmistress—all variously haunted, all left haltingly undeveloped. After this film and the earlier *The Cars That Ate Paris*, it's evident that Weir has a real sense of odd atmospheric pressures, though in both films pieces are left lying, not yet locked into place by narrative.

Colin Westerbeck writes elsewhere about **Taxi Driver**, Martin Scorsese's picture of the New York night streets and the solitary, irrational and finally hideously murderous pursuits of the man who drives a cab around them. *Taxi Driver* is an unsettling film, certainly, with its fatalistic view of a mind slipping out of gear (we have the feeling that we are watching De Niro and that he is also watching us), its exceptionally blood-stained denouement, and its odd final scene, which amounts to a kind of acceptance of the violence. But the film actually comes across as rather less of a portent than advance reports had suggested; I'm not sure that there isn't too much natural exuberance in Scorsese for him quite to come to terms with sustained, introverted mania, however Bressonian his intentions—and those of his scriptwriter, Paul Schrader—may have been. There's a slight suggestion of thesis about the film, as though events were being willed in the scriptwriter's mind, antitheses thought out in terms of what might shockingly be made of them.

The lonely man in the Swedish **Giliap**,



Hanns Zischler in Wim Wenders' 'Im Lauf der Zeit'

Roy Andersson's film in the Directors' Fortnight, is even more self-contained, though far less threatening. This is an odd film, very slow, full of silences that are evidently never going to be broken by speech but only by the camera's eventual decision to turn away. The central character (Thommy Berggren) takes a job as a waiter in a dour city hotel—his first period on duty coincides with a funeral lunch, of which one imagines the establishment may have many. Eventually, he becomes involved in hapless crime and violence. But part of the appeal of an ungainly, wryly comic, genuinely original work is its sense of the hotel as a setting, imposing its routine on staff who all think of themselves as transients, little islands of non-communication. Tables are carefully laid but the expected important guests never turn up; in the morning, a lone survivor from the funeral party surfaces from his lair behind a sofa, a sorry old man, twittering his reluctance to go home.

The Fassbinder team's latest, **Schatten der Engel**, is written by Fassbinder and Daniel Schmid, directed by the latter, and based on Fassbinder's play *The Garbage, the City and Death*, which caused some furore because its property speculator is a Jew, and because it contains such lines as 'If they'd gassed him, I could sleep better today.' All talk and tableaux, and featuring, as well as the rich Jew, a very melancholy prostitute who hangs about complaining of the cold, the film breaks the German post-war taboo on anti-Semitic reference with a dull thud. Fassbinder is said to have written it 'almost in a state of trance', during a flight from Frankfurt to Los Angeles. However the speeches sound in German, as translated into the French subtitles they read like daily mottoes for a rather *outré* tear-off calendar; or in-flight bulletins.

Two American documentaries of some reputation, **The California Reich** (directors: Walter Parkes and Keith Critchlow) and **Hollywood on Trial** (director: David Helpen Jr.), were both disappointing. Tristram Powell's BBC film on the Holly-

wood blacklist did a better job with much the same material, while the film about present-day Nazis in California relies on the *frisson* of the swastika and is notably short on historical perspective. On the whole, one suspects that European standards for the compilation/interview film are currently rather higher than America's. But *cinéma vérité* pulled off one of its most bizarre achievements with **Grey Gardens**, the Maysles' film about Jackie Onassis' aunt, Edith Bouvier Beale, her daughter (also Edith) and their somewhat crazed seclusion in an over-grown, cat-haunted mansion in East Hampton. The film has been attacked as 'exploitation'; and of course it's voyeuristic to watch mother and daughter reviving past triumphs (the aged Mrs Beale singing 'Tea for Two') and nagging over past miseries (the daughter's multiple resentments). But the film would seem if anything to have been a therapeutic experience for the Beales, who evidently feel they have found their biographers, and its mixture of performance and self-exposure is undeniably riveting. Alarming, the junior Edith suggests one of those snappy Hepburn debutantes from the 1940s, Tracy Lord herself perhaps, more than thirty years older, tremulous about life and herself, but still somehow frozen in time. Art and life, as usual, inextricably intertwined.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

The difference between the main Festival at Cannes and the Directors' Fortnight (originally conceived as a counter-festival) has gradually withered away since 1969. The main Festival now shows films it would never have taken a chance on five years ago, and the Directors' Fortnight is left with rather slim pickings. (As to the Critics' Week, the less said this year the better.) The only truly remarkable films in the Quinzaine were Rivette's *Duelle* and of course the opening night scandal, Oshima's **Empire of the Senses**. (Its more accurate Japanese title—for this is a Japanese-French

co-production—is *Love Corrida*.)

There were at least a dozen screenings of the Oshima film, any of which one had to fight one's way into because here it was, the first hard-core sex film made by a distinguished and serious director. All it proved to me was that, distinguished director or no, non-stop sex is a terrible bore. And, hardly pausing to eat, our nymphomaniac prostitute and equally obsessed pimp do nothing but screw for at least three-quarters of the film. Then the influence of Georges Bataille gets injected into the film, as Oshima begins to explore the close connections posited by Bataille between sex and death. So, following an apparently true story of the 1930s, the girl strangles the man (with his permission) to death, thus achieving the perfect orgasm. She then cuts off his sexual organs and, we are told by the narrator, wanders about Tokyo for days 'arousing compassion' until she is finally arrested.

It is only fair to say that there were many who found the film both profound and moving, so mine is something of a minority report. I am afraid I was also in the minority in admiring the Jancsó film **Private Vices, Public Virtues**, which, as it was only soft-core, was allowed within the august precincts of the Festival Palais. This is an Italo-Yugoslav co-production, written by the Italian Giovanna Gagliardo, and with a cast of Hungarian, British and Italian origins. As the film is a variation on the Mayerling legend, and vaguely set in the multi-national Austro-Hungarian Empire, this seemed less incongruous than usual. Many historians believe that the Mayerling legend was just that—a legend—and that the Crown Prince was 'suicided' because of his too evident sympathies with the aspirations of the national minorities within the Empire. There is no proof either way, and Jancsó has preferred a different version, that of a Prince who revolts against his position as successor to the throne, against his father, who is not only father but King, and against the hypocrisy of the society in which he lives. This revolt is carried on through sexual means, not political ones. Although of course the point of the film is that sexual revolt can also be a kind of political revolt, since the Oedipal relation applies not only to the natural father but to The Fathers and hence to the State. One doesn't have to be a Marxist to realise from the start that this revolt is doomed, and that the Prince knows it. So what we get is an elegiac picture of a Garden of Eden before the expulsion.

Unlike Jancsó's earlier films, this one has over three hundred shots (*Elektra* had only eleven); but interestingly enough, it doesn't make any difference. Jancsó's style—his camera movements, his choreography—looks very much the same even when cut up into shorter takes. Why did so many people dislike the film? For one thing, there was the hermaphrodite. Marie is presented, and I mean fully frontally presented, as a ravishingly beautiful person with both male and female sexual attributes. This upset many, intrigued some, and won a round of applause for the special effects director. There was also the fact that Jancsó's Eden is one in which sexuality is polymorphous: everyone does everything

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In The Picture

Star Tracks

'When I came here in the autumn of 1975,' said Gary Kurtz, waving at EMI's Elstree Studios on a spring day of 1976, 'absolutely nothing was happening.' Kurtz, who like so many former students at the University of Southern California's film school seems to have got his first break directing a piece of Roger Corman's *The Terror*, was co-producer of the enormously successful *American Graffiti*. On the strength of that, he was now doing a solo number, in a state of apparent serenity, on George Lucas' *Star Wars*, for which Fox had put up a budget of six and a half million dollars.

'In Hollywood,' he went on, 'the stages were so full of television shows and disaster epics we couldn't get near them. It was unbelievable to me that over here there was so much space, so much talent, and so much opportunity going to waste. George and I had been preparing *Star Wars* for three years—in fact we could have made it before *Graffiti*—and we were ready to start shooting. So we moved in.'

Even as *Star Wars* arrived, such are the fortunes of the film industry, a large contingent of British talent was moving out, recruited by Richard Attenborough for rather more conservative military manoeuvres. But Kurtz and Lucas have secured some of the best names in the business, among them Gil Taylor (director of photography for *Strangelove*, *Hard Day's Night* and Hitchcock's *Frenzy*), John Barry (production designer for *Clockwork Orange*), and John Stears (special effects man for several Bond films). And they tempted Alec Guinness, engagingly dubbed 'a Knight to remember' by the publicity unit, to include science fiction among the subjects he has chosen for his return to the screen after some eight years. It is, naturally, a starring role.

It was plain at Elstree that *Star Wars* had taken over. All nine stages were festooned with amazing architecture, including a labyrinth of curling corridors, ramps and airlocks, a vista of one-dimensional rocket tubes, and a spectacular pirate spaceship, brooding like a huge concrete manta-ray

over the meteor holes that had been burned into it during the previous day's shooting. It looked like a sculpture by Chris Foss, the ubiquitous paperback artist, but in fact the basic art work for the production was by Ralph McQuarrie, an aerospace designer who had never turned his paints to adventure fiction before. The production offices were dominated by his works, superb vistas of alien landscapes and armoured figures battling with laser-swords. Suddenly you could see why Fox were happy to be involved.

A slight figure rendered even slighter by the occupants of the Death Star who towered around him, George Lucas was supervising the destruction of a planet or two under the orders of Peter Cushing. The front-projection scenes had only just arrived and turned out to be useless, so an entire wall of the Galactic Empire headquarters had been rustled up from nowhere and his actors were being posed and re-posed against

it, muttering scraps of apocalyptic dialogue with steel-eyed intensity. It took the best part of a morning to get the scene right, a surprisingly generous slice from what was no more than a thirteen-week schedule. Over lunch, Lucas was as placid as his producer about the delay.

'I figure I'm still just a student,' he said. Close-up, he resembles a bearded Alfred E. Neumann in Clark Kent glasses. 'I set myself a stack of problems and I want to see if I can solve them. After *Graffiti*—which we'd never have had the chance to make if Francis (Coppola) hadn't been prepared to lend his name on it—the way was open for me. So I decided I might never get to do a multi-million dollar movie if I didn't do it now. It's going to take another year—we've got at least six months of model and special effects work to do back in California—and at the end of that time I might just go back to little experimental movies. But I'll have proved to myself that I can do the Hollywood epic thing, large cast, studio sets, elaborate plot, the whole unwieldy convention.'

For two and a half weeks he had taken everybody to Tunisia, where salt-lake flats provided the identity of the Planet Tatooine, home of Luke the Starkiller. It was so hot, even the robots melted. But everybody was delighted with the results, and the stills looked magnificent. Might one detect, in the central character of Luke, a symbol of personal enterprise not dissimilar from the malcontents of *THX 1138* and *American Graffiti*? 'Absolutely,' said Lucas, 'it's the same story. *THX* was allegory with a touch of cubism, *Graffiti* was sociology plus nostalgia, and *Star Wars* is total fantasy for today's

kids who don't have the opportunity to grow up watching *Flash Gordon* and have to sit through movies of insecurity instead (like *Earthquake* or *Towering Inferno*). I identify totally with Thex, struggling out from a benevolent and disintegrating environment; I wasted four years of my life cruisin' like the kids in *Graffiti*, and I'm now on an intergalactic dream of heroism. I'm telling the story of me, and—who knows?—it might set a trend.'

He squared his shoulders like Bruce Wayne and strode back to the Death Star. At his heels, a remote-controlled robot, disguised as a train of small black trolleys, performed an excited pirouette.

PHILIP STRICK

If It's Tuesday It Must be Belgium

On Tuesday, April 13, Alain Resnais began shooting his new film *Providence* in Antwerp. This would be an event in any case, but the fact that it is his first film to be shot in English—and with a script by David Mercer—makes it even more exciting. Of course, this is far from being Resnais' first English-language project. There was the Marquis de Sade film, which was written by Richard Seaver, but which never got off the ground. There is also a script by Stan Lee (of Marvel Comics fame) called *The Inmates*; but that, for the time being, has been postponed.

Resnais finds the idea of working in another language more than a little frightening. 'It cuts the ground from under your feet. I'd never do a realistic film in a foreign language, but *Providence* is an imaginary work, unreal, irrational.

One of Ralph McQuarrie's designs for 'Star Wars'



And I'm curious to see just what will happen working in English. Ivan Passer told me that you just don't say the same things in a language that is not your mother tongue.'

The idea of working with Mercer came from Resnais' producers, Klaus Hellwig and Yves Gasser. Although Resnais had never seen or read any of Mercer's plays (he has now), he did know the films *Morgan* and *Family Life*, and he had been interested in Mercer's views on the drama which he had read—and cut out and saved—in various English theatre magazines. Mercer, too, was interested by the idea. He had seen all Resnais' films except *Je t'aime, je t'aime*, and since he feels that he is at a stage in his own work where he is more and more involved with questions of style and form, the idea of working with a man he considers a master in this realm was very attractive. After some preliminary meetings, during which it soon became clear that they were temperamentally suited to each other, Mercer got to work on the first version of the script. But although Resnais, as we know, boasts of never writing a line, the work was essentially a collaboration. As Mercer put it to me, 'We were not just combining separate ideas and approaches, we really were collaborating. And we found we had much in common: our attitudes to life, to politics, our former ideological convictions.'

Collaboration or not, Resnais and Mercer see the film differently. For Resnais, it is about an elderly man (John Gielgud) who passes in judgment the various members of his family only to discover, like Oedipus, that he is the defendant in this 'trial'. Mercer doesn't see it that way. For him, there is no trial, the old man is neither accuser nor defendant. He is a novelist at

the end of his life, and the film is a kind of valedictory work: 'But the way he sets up the characters in his novel has no relationship to reality—as far as I am concerned. Resnais isn't so sure.'

And it is true that Resnais sees the first two-thirds of the film as imaginary—Gielgud's barrister son (Dirk Bogarde), his bastard son (David Warner) and his daughter-in-law (Ellen Burstyn) as imagined by the novelist. The last third, however, will show them in a different light. Not necessarily more realistic, for one of the questions of the film is whether we are what *we* think we are, or what others think us to be. The novelist, the imaginer, exercises a kind of domination over the creatures of his imagination. He 'possesses' them, in the Dostoevskian sense. So, in a way, says Resnais, the script is a kind of continuation of Mercer's experiments in his latest play, *Duck Song*.

This imaginary film will be set in what Resnais calls a 'patchwork'. Some of it is being shot in Belgium (Antwerp, Brussels and Louvain), some in France (Paris and Limoges) and there will be some exteriors in New England.

The first line of dialogue in the film is, ironically, 'Surely the facts are not in dispute.' Because of course they are—especially as regards a character I have not yet mentioned, that of Bogarde's mistress (Elaine Stitch). The barrister's mother had committed suicide, and he has never quite been able to come to terms with this, always thinking that his father was somehow to blame. So, maliciously, in the novel he is writing, the father presents his son with a mistress who *could* have been his mother. But one doesn't have to be a Freudian to see it in another way: it is not altogether unlikely that the son

would choose a mistress who did in fact resemble his mother.

My various conversations with Resnais left one other thing in dispute: the authorship of the film. On the one hand, there is Resnais, who claims that Mercer is the only begetter of the script; and then there is Mercer, who suggests that although it is true that Resnais doesn't write anything, he has a way of making the writer change something he doesn't like. He never suggests what the change should be, but he keeps on until you find the solution that you can't help suspecting was the one he always had in mind. Resnais' politeness is proverbial, but so is his stubbornness. Like the gentlest of locomotives, he keeps on pushing until he gets what he wants.

Ultimately, it doesn't matter who is responsible for what. It's the film that counts, and for that we will have to wait until next February. Surely, there can be no dispute that it should be worth waiting for.

RICHARD ROUD

Cartagena Festival

There is something about the layout of Cartagena which brings to mind Venice: the old town almost surrounded by water, the rich new town spreading out along a glorified sandbank, and an industrial section vaguely glimpsed somewhere across the lagoon and sensed, more immediately, by the havoc being wrought on the 16th-century stonework of the Spanish colonial walls and palaces. Like the central image of Arturo Ripstein's glossy, pretentious *Fox-trot*, the world premiere of which closed the Sixteenth Cartagena International Film Festival, the seeming tropical paradise has already admitted corruption, and

it is not so curious after all to find that ecology is one of the recurring themes of Colombia's newly flourishing short film industry.

And flourishing that certainly seems to be. The reason is the same as for the spectacular expansion of feature production in neighbouring Venezuela last year: sensible aid from the government. Since the widow Peron was deposed, Colombia and Venezuela are left the only two major Latin American countries with vaguely democratic rule, and are tending to cling together for mutual help and protection. Both feel a strong need to develop their own film industries, free from the restrictive hold of foreign (particularly Mexican) distributors, and both have eager new generations of filmmakers, often trained abroad in the States, Italy or France. The most useful aspect of the Cartagena Festival this year for locals, and the most interesting for visitors, was the chance it offered to check up on the results of the last year's policies (an extra levy on each ticket sold for a programme showing a quality Colombian short; the full operation of a government-sponsored film finance corporation for Venezuelan features) in terms of films made and shown, to meet the new filmmakers and to pool information and ideas.

Of more than 120 shorts made last year in Colombia, about half came up to the regulating board's standards of quality (two classes), and of these 24 were shown in competition. They ranged in quality from the respectable to the brilliant. Some of the best work was the most straightforward: classic documentary on ethnological subjects like *Madre Tierra* and *La Cosecha Indígena*, both about the effects of social change on primitive Indian tribes. But the film-makers (mostly in their mid-twenties) who tried something more adventurous also had their triumphs. Manuel Busquets' *Todos Somos Responsables*, for instance, a brief and ruthless nightmare about pollution, or *Corralejas*, a stunning editing job by Manuel José Alvarez which begins like a harmless travelogue, works to a scarifying climax of mass hysteria and blood-lust, and then makes as though to carry on regardless with the next batch of quaint local customs. Last year no wholly Colombian feature was made, but most of these documentarists are just waiting for the chance, and when the projected co-production deal with Venezuela goes through they will no doubt get it.

Meanwhile the first year of full operation for the Venezuelan government's finance scheme saw the production of an unprecedented 15 features, which in general did so well at the box-office that they got into profit in Venezuela alone and encouraged a further spectacular leap in production to 53 films this year in production or final preparation. It would be asking too much to

Photograph by Alain Resnais. The house is not a location for 'Providence', but expresses something of the atmosphere Resnais is looking for



look for masterpieces among the six features which were shown at Cartagena. Interestingly enough, the biggest commercial success, Ramon Chabaud's *Sagrado y Obsceno*, is by far the weakest—a pounding naïve picture of an ex-revolutionary out for revenge and out of step with the modern world in which he seeks it, wildly over-acted by, I would imagine, people whom Chabaud, a popular Venezuelan playwright, has worked with in the theatre. All the same, people say this is a good film for local audiences; but then they say that also about the Cuban entry, Sergio Giral's *El Otro Francisco*, a crude variation on the *Mandingo* theme made to sound somewhat serious by a heavily didactic commentary, and very disappointing in comparison with the glories of Cuban cinema a few years back.

Elsewhere in the Venezuelan films some more productive influences crop up: Costa-Gavras in Mauricio Walerstein's *Cronica de un Subversivo Latinoamericano*, an ingeniously constructed thriller about a political kidnapping; the Rosi of *Mani sulla Città* in Daniel Oropeza's effective if rather overwrought *Maracaibo Petroleum Company*. And for the archives there is a first-rate feature-length compilation, Manuel de Pedro's *Juan Vicente Gomez y Su Epoca*, Gomez being the last important nationalist dictator of Venezuela and his epoch the period of the warlords, from 1910 to 1935.

The rest of the festival was useful to locals, who through it got a first look at *Nashville*, *Adèle H*, *Lacombe Lucien* and *Black Moon*, *Poachers* and miscellaneous films from Taiwan, Pakistan and other exotic places, but mostly pretty familiar to outsiders. But Cartagena is now the only film festival surviving in Latin America, and perfectly placed as the world's window on what is going on there—otherwise these days a rather mysterious topic. At least what has been on show this year is encouraging enough to send one back next year for an update.

JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR

World Without Shadows

'It was possible to do *All the President's Men* after *The Parallax View*,' says Alan Pakula. 'I don't know if it would have been possible to do *The Parallax View* after *All the President's Men*. One reflects for me a kind of despair and fear about our society; and the other one reflects a hope. One of the reasons I was so attracted to doing *All the President's Men* is the very reason I did *The Parallax View*. And the fact that they're antithetical in resolution is part of the attraction.'

A prophecy of doom that largely fell on deaf ears, *The Parallax View* was an almost abstract meditation on a climate of distrust and disillusion that had yet to find an articulate cause in Watergate. 'I

think that the Sixties, which were very traumatic for the States, starting with the assassinations and then the endless Vietnam war, left many Americans with a fear of the unknown within the society that they'd never felt before; an almost Kafka-like fear that seemed more appropriate to Central European and Asiatic countries than to the States. And *Parallax* was an almost nightmare reflection of that.' Two years later, there is instructive irony in the fact that Pakula is reaping much more substantial rewards for revealing a light in the gloom with *All the President's Men*. 'The pivotal centre visually of this film is that newsroom—that hard, white light, that world without shadows. You can hide nothing in that world. And what do they do there—they expose truth.'

The contrasting styles and functions of the reporters in the two films says a lot about their divergent aims. '*All the President's Men* is much more rigidly controlled in style because of the very nature of the work itself. It's about the mechanics of gathering information, and that becomes the action. The action is rather cerebral.' A large part of that action involves putting information together at the peculiar remove imposed by a telephone receiver, an instrument that has served Pakula often before in dramatising a communication block ('Somebody said I should have a free phone service for the rest of my life'). But here it is particularly crucial in 'trying to get the reality of their experience, the endless tedium of being locked in one place with a phone and a pad and trying to figure out what leads to what. And when Dustin's with Jane Alexander, that book-keeper, it's like you're caught together in time, and that's the essence of that kind of confrontation between the reporter and the person he's interviewing. You're just locked in there, and if the camera had started to move it would have broken the whole hypnotic quality.'

For all that Pakula regards *The Parallax View* as being very different in style—'much more picaresque, much more surreal, kind of American baroque'—it can also be seen dealing in the imagery of individuals locked in place and time, though with much more sinister implications. Its central metaphor, the 'parallax view', is 'the compression of time in America, the layers of time just being compressed on to each other, so it's almost like earthquakes are bound to come out of it in so many ways—human earthquakes.' Thus Warren Beatty's reporter works for an editor whose comfortable, shabby office represents, Pakula says, 'much more simple American values, almost nineteenth century values. It represented a family, a man who was rooted, a whole American tradition that was dying, an anachronism, as compared to this totally cold and enormously bizarre world that Beatty goes after, and in comparison to his own character, which is the totally



'Providence'. Resnais rehearsing a scene with Elaine Stritch

rootless modern man.' The film 'takes a lot of those American myths, all the most movie versions of the indestructible hero figure, carried almost to the point of kitsch, and says this is what has happened to them. The American hero character who can do anything, who can survive anything and expose the truth in the end, has been destroyed. We can't believe in him any more.'

A similar strain of 'visual wit' can be seen working through *All the President's Men*, despite its more cleanly functional, almost documentary procedures. 'In most detective stories people go to the underbelly of the world, where lives are in chaos; and in this one, just the opposite: you go to the sunlit world of people who belong, whose lives are orderly and who pay their taxes on time. And all looks right with the world, and yet there's chaos, there's something crumbling underneath it. On that porch on the side of the book-keeper's house, I said to Gordon Willis, I would like you to do this as if you were doing an impressionist painting. I want it lyrical, I want dappled sunlight coming through the trees. And then within that, all they're talking about are these little pieces of decay. Sloan, the young man, sits in his wing chair and there's a kind of round, eighteenth century mirror in back of him, and it's all like a little reproduction of an eighteenth century world. And it's thrown away, but it's that orderly world, it's the American dream gone awry.'

'I do love objects as symbols in certain ways. And that's why the film begins with the typewriter keys—the typewriter as a weapon. Words as bullets. These unlikely weapons finally brought down this enormous power, behind those huge intangible buildings. We got so lucky when we saw the tape of Nixon and it had the twenty-one gun salute, because then I could have the guns against the typewriters. There's the battle right there.'

RICHARD COMBS

The Last Tempest

Li Han-Hsiang's *The Last Tempest* is the second part of a two-part epic devoted to the declining years of the Ch'ing dynasty. (The first part is *The Empress Dowager*.) I met the director on the watery set of his latest film, a compendium of erotic tales set in period China, at Shaw Brothers on the last day of shooting. Li admitted a definite preference for the second part: 'I got rid of the exposition in *The Empress Dowager*. The second I was able to develop more fluently, more concentratedly. But I feel it will be less popular with the public.' As it turned out he was right, and after opening to packed houses the box-office for *The Last Tempest* dropped disappointingly.

It is possibly not surprising. *The Last Tempest* emerges as a film of great visual and thematic sophistication. The first part established the somewhat equivocal hand-over of power from the Empress Dowager to the young puppet Emperor Kuang-hsi and explored the stresses within a nation under pressure from foreign invasion. *The Last Tempest* is set in 1898, on the eve of the Boxer Rebellion, and crystallises its narrative around the rise and fall of the abortive Hundred Days of the Reform Movement. An initial viewing leaves questions, and the density and foreignness of the material makes a second viewing rewarding. A very classic leave-taking scene between the Emperor and Concubine Chen seems overlong. The passionate closing ballad that invokes China's torn future seems abruptly introduced. And there is the odd, and in a film of notable historical accuracy oddly disconcerting, anachronism. Subsequent viewings wipe away the reservations.

Everything about *The Last Tempest* is intensified, and everything contributes to its major dynamic, whereby the centre of power is not simply shifted by the end of the film but the very nature of power changes before our eyes.

Li sets up a sense of action taking place within a deceptive environment, of a game played within a slowly closing trap, of a false situation at the heart of which lies a mystery that belongs not only to the film but to history. (The degree of the Emperor's involvement in the promulgation of the 'Vermilion Decree' that called for recourse to assassination.) The Emperor frames reformist decrees, flanked by pictures of Peter the Great and the Emperor Meiji, at his elbow freshly translated biographies of foreign statesmen, but the real power lies elsewhere. Li's film operates as a many-stranded evocation of impotence—personal, political, historical, national. The scenario is charged with sexual tension, underscored by Li's awareness of the power of tactile suggestion (ice and sweat mingle in the credit sequence as a servant bears refreshments to the royal table). Kuang-hsi struggles to define himself through action and manages only to reveal his vulnerability.

Li raises ideological questions specifically through sequences involving the two leaders of the reform movement, Kang Yu-wei, the enlightened Confucian, and Tan Szu-tung, the scholar and radical reformist who quits his moderate position to go out to die a hero's death ('No one has shed blood for China—it will start from me!'). Tan is allowed to grow in stature through the film, coming finally to be defined in the active sexual terms denied Kuang-hsi ('Bring me the Hunan bull!'). Pressed about the rousing development of the film away from what might be read as a pro-reformist position to something stronger, Li is cautiously circumspect. 'The play that provided part of the basis for the film was written during the Japanese invasion and designed very much to inflame the audience. Historically the reforms were inadequate. My viewpoint is con-

tained within the film, I can't say more than that. Except that I am anxious that Western audiences do not think of my films as simply historical. I would like audiences to see China—and Hong Kong, which is really a place with no identity of its own—not simply as they are now, or as they were . . . but to understand the present through the past.'

Li makes consummate use of his sets (he has been working with his art director Chen Ching-shen for some twenty years), relishing the opportunities offered by the studio to heighten the sense of artificiality, from the blaze of gilt of the opening sequences to the heavy, elaborate framing devices in the latter ones, and the stirring orchestration of the deliberately theatrical 'tempest' that brews simultaneously with the political one. At one point Kuang-hsi seems to be sitting on a literally teetering throne; at another the sweeping progress of the Empress through the streets ends in a series of stabbing close-ups of her six-inch heels hammering past the prostrate form of Kuang-hsi. But this is a film remarkable as often for understatement. And Li's tactics can be savoured at their most delicately witty in some of the early sequences. During the taking of the royal group photograph, the Empress finds herself caught between the demands of Western technology (the camera) which call upon her to remain motionless, and those of State which demand that she nod assent. (She moves.)

Li's current project is a modern erotic fable and he is also working on a script of the seventeenth century Chinese erotic classic *The Before Midnight Scholar* (literally *The Prayer Mat of the Flesh*) usually described as 'the first—meaning best—wind and wave novel.' Perhaps an enterprising distributor . . .

VERINA GLAESSNER

Buck Henry's Voices

As the mild-mannered patents lawyer Oliver Farnsworth, vaguely intimidated behind his thick pebble spectacles by the prospect of limitless wealth dangled before him by his extra-terrestrial client, Buck Henry is one of the more prosaic presences in Nicolas Roeg's *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. Though in the cosmic scheme of this extraordinary tale of paradise lost, his part is none the less enigmatic for that.

In London recently for the opening of the film, the comedy writer and part-time actor was looking forward to the opportunity of a second viewing—as others may have felt the need since—to consider further the mysteries of both his own role ('I have no idea why Farnsworth is a homosexual') and the film as a whole. 'I only read the script twice. And both times I told Nic I didn't understand what it was about. I didn't expect to find out what it was about, but I expected as long as he knew, or claimed to, it was OK by me. And while we were working we used to have very amusing dialectical discussions about films in general and this film in particular, during which I repeated quite often that you can't use what we're doing here as an example, because I don't understand the film that we are making. And he insisted that I was saying this to attempt to drive him mad.'

One reason Roeg seems to have had for doubting his actor's word in this case was that he had finally managed to see a script which Henry had written some years previously with Roeg in mind—a very uncharacteristic sounding project, described by the author as a 'metaphysical thriller' about assassination. And Henry's hesitation in settling points of interpretation on *The Man Who Fell to Earth* is tempered by his analytical

appreciation of Roeg's direction. 'In spite of the fact that he's thought of as a particularly cinematic director, because of the barrage of images he gives you, in effect he seems to me to be particularly literary. He will stop at any time to explore an idea within a scene that ordinarily only a novelist can afford to stop for, as though the camera were like the first person, like the "I" character in a novel.'

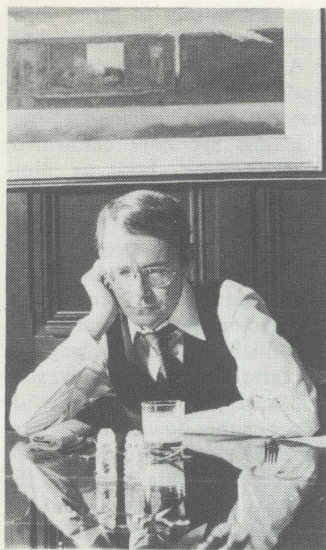
The literary analogy also suggests where Henry's difficulties with the film begin, and indicates some of the qualities of his own writing. 'It's my television training, I suppose. I have to ask myself narrative questions to satisfy myself. It seems to me that if you're going to tell a sort of double-levelled story in a film, one of the levels has to be clear. You can be as obscure as you want on the secondary level, or on the primary level, as long as the other one is quite precise . . . otherwise what you ultimately come to is "Everything is everything, baby," as they say in Harlem. I think that's the death of art. It's a form of decadence that again is highly literary and it's echoed particularly in American literature right now—Pynchon, for instance. It's the most fun to read, and the most difficult and the most decadent and the most literary, and the most cinematic, too.'

For a writer who describes his educational background as being rather traditional and literary, and who emphasises a formal scrupulousness and technical exactitude in his own work, the ambivalent appeal of such playful combinations comes out in a project like *Catch-22*. 'The one time I really fooled around with time a lot, because there are places where things happen before they happen in a strict chronological context. Although I think I worked it out so that the logic is straight even though the scenes are juxtaposed, there are no cheats.' And if the elaborate flashback (and forward) structure of that film anticipates the ways Roeg is 'splitting time up on film,' Henry regrets that the potentialities for something akin to science fiction in *The Day of the Dolphin*—the 'infinite possibilities' at one point conjured up by the main character—were left undeveloped. 'I picked the wrong solution. The better way would have been to have gone in instead of out somehow for the story. But I couldn't find whatever the other thing was. I intended it to be a fantasy, which is the reason it starts with this guy talking into camera, saying "imagine". And, it's corny to talk about, but it's the reason I called the boat the Erewhon.'

Part of the discipline which Henry brings to writing comedy is his sense that it is 'sort of technical writing in an odd way. If you've worked for a long time in comedy you've ultimately written in loads of different voices. In two years of a television variety show I worked on, I must have written for sixty, seventy, eighty American comics. There were different ones

'The Last Tempest': the photographer at the court of the Empress





Buck Henry in 'The Man Who Fell to Earth'

each week. It's a great training ground for voices, for being able to write voices. There's nothing about *The Owl and the Pussycat* which is deeply moving, but I had certain strong things to work with, which were Barbra and George's voices, which I knew very well, and it was fun for me to work with them in mind. I can write dialogue endlessly for strong voices.' On *Catch-22*: 'the difficulty was technical, but I so loved that book; if you're imbued with *Catch-22*, you can talk it. But as Nichols pointed out once we started shooting, what was driving him crazy was the lack of behaviour. He didn't have behaviour to work with, only attitude.'

When he returns to *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, Henry has one or two theories to hold 'in the back of my mind.' One is that the film may be a 'massive metaphor for an artist—the seer, the man who is capable of seeing things in a different way, he has different eyes and is thereby a threat to society, to people who see normally, because the thing about the eyes is all through the film. It is all through a lot of Nic's films.' And Newton is also 'not an unreasonable metaphor for a generation of young people whose knowledge of the world comes from media bombardment, who can barely construct a coherent sentence but can disassemble a television set and make two radios and a telephone out of the pieces that are left over. There's something zombie-like about that personality that deals only in constructs, in the way things go together and come apart, because Newton doesn't really seem to have any ideas, he just has techniques.'

Appropriately enough, this dryly humorous, and wryly pragmatic, creator (and performer) of comic fantasies remains sceptical about the game of worlds which—like some of his literary contemporaries—Roeg can play through his own techniques. 'It would be interesting to talk to a Pynchon and see if he believed in magic—if he were only using the devices as literary devices, or whether he

believed that you could create another world. I believe that Nic thinks there is another world to be created and drawn from. He does believe in the supernatural. Nic and I have enormous arguments about the other-worldly, and about art. We don't agree about a lot of things. Except we both agree that he is a terrific guy, albeit very short.'

RICHARD COMBS

Mary Hartman and Others

In commercial as well as artistic terms, the 1975-76 television season in the U.S. has been the worst in memory. Audience levels have dropped a remarkable five per cent over the previous year. At mid-season the networks committed wholesale re-programming, bringing in 22 new shows—33 per cent of the prime time schedule—to bolster ratings. Many highly touted shows of the fall season (*Fay* and *Beacon Hill* among the most prominent) were yanked after only a handful of episodes; if a programme doesn't bloom immediately, the new philosophy goes, weed it out and plant a new one.

The replacement shows of the so-called 'second season' delivered, at best, more of the same. The 'Six Million Dollar Man' was joined by the 'Bionic Woman'; police shows multiplied like pocket computers; and, of course, spin-offs abounded. While most of the network material inspires only occasional yawns, the people who shape that material are again in the news. Martin Antonowsky, a former research chief at ABC, is now in charge of NBC's schedule. His proclivity for axeing shows before they've had a chance to get off the ground has earned him the sobriquet 'Attila the Hun of television'. Fred Silverman, who planned CBS's prime-time schedule for 1975-76, has moved to ABC, thus putting him in the position of programming against his own schedule; no one should know its weaknesses better. Partially as a result, ABC, a perennial also-ran, is having its best season ever. (Silverman also seems to have a much more sophisticated sense of the potential of network television. The next few years should show whether he is able to apply it in practice.)

The prime-time network schedule has thus become a game, more enjoyable to read about than to watch. But there have been a few bright spots (none of them, significantly, network prime-time programmes). NBC's *Saturday Night*, an hour-and-a-half variety show, the product of a group of young writer performers (many of them formerly associated with the *National Lampoon* theatrical/magazine conglomerate; several of them, ironically, Canadian in origin), has attracted attention with its relatively sophisticated humour. Writer turned actor Chevy Chase has become the acknowledged star of the show, specialising in

sublimely straight parodies of TV news. Chase has got most mileage out of a never-ending stream of gags about Gerald Ford's clumsiness. Far from bristling at Chase's cuts, Ford apparently welcomes them. His Press Secretary Ron Nessen was host for one *Saturday Night* in April and Ford himself appeared in two clips, joining in the parody. The only precedent for this was Nixon's five-second appearance on *Laugh-In* during the 1968 campaign, intoning solemnly the catch-line of that show: 'Sock it to me?' (Prescient, really.)

Meanwhile, Public Television has finally launched NET's bi-centennial series, *The Adams Chronicles*, five years in the planning and produced in 1975 with a cost-overrun of more than \$2 million (which seriously damaged other programming on the fund-starved public network). Thirteen episodes which trace the career of the Adams family (two Presidents—John and John Quincy—plus revolutionary Sam and Charles Francis, among other lesser lights), the show is also a 'declaration of independence' from British imports that have dominated the PBS schedule for the last five years. Watching the third episode one had the feeling that *The Adams Chronicles* had finally jelled—the *mise en scène* was tighter, more effective; the acting was beginning to show signs of subtlety—only to discover in the credits at the end that this particular episode was directed by none other than James Cellan Jones, the acknowledged British master at this sort of thing. *Plus ça change...*

The only really novel production of 1976 is Norman Lear's parodic soap opera *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*. After trying without success to sell *Mary Hartman* to the networks, Lear last fall put together his own chain of independent stations and the show opened in January. It is quintessential Lear, and in six weeks it had enabled a number of independent stations seriously to challenge network ratings. *Mary Hartman*, like every soap opera, is shot on tape with no studio audience or laugh track, five half-hours per

week, punctuated with tremulous organ music.

Mary Hartman (Louise Lasser) lives with her husband Tom and daughter Heather in the little town of Fernwood, Ohio. Her next door neighbours are Charlie and Loretta Haggars. Loretta is planning to go off to Nashville to be a Country and Western star. She writes songs like 'Ah feel so good when you're feeling me.' In the first few weeks of the series: Mary's grandfather, the 'Fernwood Flasher', is arrested for exposing himself; the thirty-year-old social worker assigned to the case falls in love with 'Grandpa Larkin'. Mary's younger sister is having an affair with a deaf-mute poet. Mary and Tom haven't been sleeping together, and end up hiring a sex therapist to help them with their problems. Tom's high school basketball coach comes down with flu; Mary brings him chicken soup. While Mary and the coach's wife are chatting not five feet away, Leroy drowns in one inch of chicken soup (on camera and entirely credible). Mary has the funeral in her kitchen. No one comes.

Meanwhile, in the first episode, Fernwood has been shocked by the mass murder of the Lombardi family: 'five people, eight chickens and two goats! Who would do such a thing?' Heather has been witness to the awful deed. She is kidnapped. Mary goes to rescue her from the 17-year-old mass murderer and is herself kidnapped.

Later, Loretta and Charlie are off to Nashville and stardom. Half an hour out of Fernwood they are attacked by two 'good ol' country boys'. Loretta is given the choice of being raped, or taking along one of the men's songs to sell in Nashville. She chooses the latter alternative. Several hours later they are involved in an accident, hitting a station wagon full of nuns, and Loretta is paralysed for several weeks. More important, her demo record is destroyed...

Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman is funny. But it's also tough and nasty. It may be the most significant new departure in U.S. television in twenty years.

JAMES MONACO

Soap opera for the 1970s: Louise Lasser in 'Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman'





Russell Waters, Richard Massingham in 'What A Life' (1948)

Richard Massingham:

THE FIVE-INCH FILM-MAKER

Geoff Brown

'Si l'on me demandait quel est le grand cinéaste anglais, je répondrais: Massingham, car il est à la fois Méliès et Vigo, et si l'on me demandait quel est le roi du *suspense*, je répondrais sans hésiter: c'est Massingham. Si l'on me demandait quel est le plus grand technicien et le plus grand poète de cinéma britannique, je répondrais toujours: c'est Massingham, et si l'on me demandait quel est le metteur en scène anglais le plus près de Buñuel et de Mack Sennett, je répondrais encore une fois: c'est Massingham.'—Henri Langlois, from the memorial booklet 'Richard Massingham: A Tribute by His Friends and a Record of His Films'

Reading Henri Langlois' tribute now, over twenty years since Richard Massingham's death, it's difficult to keep one's eyebrows from shooting upwards in disbelief. If Massingham's work had such extraordinary qualities, why, one wonders, has he been allowed to fall into such neglect? Why, for that matter, did he remain in the straitjacket of short sponsored films for Government departments or bodies like the Gas Council? Wouldn't feature film producers (Michael Balcon, for instance) have been eager to help him expand his horizons and produce the great comic masterpiece?* Certainly, Massingham remains fondly remembered by 1940s cinemagoers for his tiny propaganda films ingeniously and humorously exhorting the public to sneeze into handkerchiefs rather than people's faces, or to bathe in the wartime limit of five inches of water. Yet since his heyday there has been no full-scale (or even small-scale) reassessment of his large output, whether as a director, producer or actor (the list of films runs to ninety titles, though none is over forty minutes and many are of trailer length), and the prospect of a British combination of Méliès, Vigo, Buñuel and Sennett simply seems too good to be true.

Once Massingham's output is lifted from the archive shelves and actually viewed (the National Film Archive, the Central Office of Information and the Imperial War Museum all provided material), any suspicions aroused by Langlois' claims are only confirmed. Massingham's limitations, both as filmmaker and as actor, are easily apparent, and they may as well be stated now. His films frequently sound more interesting than they prove to be; good ideas are indifferently executed, not explored with sufficient rigour. Massingham the actor sports a marvellous clown-like face, which is pulled this way and that to express extravagant joy, extravagant despondency, disgust, perplexity and ruefulness—but the face cannot do very much else, and it remains largely unco-ordinated with Massingham's deep booming voice or the looming bulk of his body. Massingham the director betrays a fatal fondness for creating comedy by artificial methods, such as speeding up the action or editing scenes so that characters jump about like firecrackers—tricks which are allowable as occasional effects, but not as a stylistic obsession. The shorter the films, the more satisfying they are, and when Massingham is without a firm propaganda message to provide the film's backbone, the results can be dangerously insipid. A feature-length film, one soon realises, was clearly beyond his capabilities, though not beyond his interests; Patrick Campbell once worked on a projected script, which had to be abandoned. Massingham's screen persona simply wasn't strong enough to survive the increased exposure.

Yet Massingham's work has real and distinctive virtues, even if they are far from the extravagant ones proposed by Langlois. In the two-minute trailers, his limitations are turned to good account: matter, method and style coalesce with ease, and propaganda has never seemed so enjoyable. And the best of the longer films display a cherishable gift for extracting humour out of the drabest situations—the business of dictating and typing government correspondence in *Pool of Contentment* (1946), for instance, or answering government telephone calls in *How to Use the Telephone* (1948, produced by Massingham but directed by Michael Law).

Massingham treats the white-collar life with an engaging combination of sympathy and irreverence, and the jokes and bits of business resound with truth—from the boss who dictates a letter while noisily rummaging in a drawer, to the waiting room so devoid of furnishings that the applicant for a new job has to tap his cigarette ash into his trouser turn-ups (*Introducing the New Worker*, 1951). And the soberer films share the same detailed surface: take the interior of the elderly couple's house in *Help Yourself* (directed by John Waterhouse in 1950, on the subject of burglar prevention), with their few banknotes tucked underneath the mantelpiece clock; or the squalid public places in Waterhouse's *Another Case of*

*A question which some contemporary critics asked. 'How is it that he has not been snatched up by the feature boys?' pondered the anonymous reviewer of *Documentary Film News*, reviewing *They Travel By Air* (a staff training film made in 1947 for BOAC). 'Good fun is so missing in British feature films that one would think there would be room there for someone whose wit and sense of cinema are obviously so beautifully balanced.'

Poisoning (1949, for the Ministry of Health), with flies nestling on pork pies in a shop window. All of which may not make Massingham 'le grand cinéaste anglais', but it does make him individual and fully worth exploring.

He was born in 1898 and belonged to a large, distinguished family, most of whom made their mark in journalism. His father, H. W. Massingham, edited *The Nation* and *The Daily Chronicle*; brother Harold (H.J.) wrote on what used to be termed country matters, while brother Hugh wrote novels and various columns for *The Observer*; Richard himself was trained in medicine and rose to the important position of Senior Medical Officer at the London Fever Hospital. His earliest films were made in his spare time during the weekends, using a decrepit Newman-Sinclair camera; friends' houses and the hospital provided interiors, while young members of the Old Vic and the hospital staff served as actors. On *Tell Me If It Hurts*, his first film (completed in 1934), editing was performed in the comfort of Massingham's living room, by the light of a coal fire; he also laboriously married the positive and negative prints without ever realising that there were printed numbers down the sides of the celluloid especially designed to make the job easy.

By 1940 he was established as a full-time director and producer, with his own company, Public Relationship Films (formed with Lewis Grant Wallace, writer for stage, screen and radio); headquarters were at 29 Whitehall—an imposing address, though the offices were opposite the Whitehall Theatre and above a fuming Italian restaurant. Yet Massingham's amateur habits clung to him throughout all his years as a professional. The budgets offered by his sponsoring bodies were almost as parsimonious as those he had allowed himself in the 1930s, and all corners were strenuously cut—most noticeably in the sphere of sound recording (the famous *Five-Inch Bather* suffers badly from some unconvincing dubbing when Massingham sings 'What Shall We Do With the Drunken Sailor?'). His office, his house and garden, his local pub all provided locations, and *To the Rescue* (made for the Children's Film Foundation in 1952) is a full-blown home movie: the story-line is built around Massingham's pet poodles, the setting is Biddenden in Kent (his own home), and the cast—apart from the two dogs—includes himself, his wife Betty and his young son Adam.

Massingham liked to surround himself with friends both before and behind the camera, though his relationships with his own employees were complicated by his lack of self-confidence. Aware of his own failings, he sought after people of known artistic integrity and high professional qualifications, yet when such people worked for PR Films (like Eily Boland, Ealing's editor, or John Krish, who had worked at the Crown Film Unit and edited the Wessex feature *The Woman in the Hall*) they chafed at his slapdash habits and Massingham himself felt ill-at-ease. His business sense, by all accounts, was non-existent; when he brought in various bureaucrats to manage the company's financial side, relationships again were stormy.

In many ways, the films he made off his

own bat in the 1930s remain the most interesting. Both *Tell Me If It Hurts* and its successor *And So To Work* (1935) are marked by the peculiar contrast between their experimental style and their non-experimental material. Most personal filmmakers of the day used camera distortions, subjective sound, abstract images and elaborate montage effects to capture a complex private pattern of emotions and meanings. But Massingham uses all this avant-garde paraphernalia to convey the well-known horrors of a visit to the dentist and the problems of getting up and breakfasted in a boarding house. *Tell Me If It Hurts*—described in its titles as 'a soundfilm by R. Massingham'—opens in an expensive restaurant (in reality the mews flat of Massingham's German cameraman, Karl Urbahn); Russell Waters (then at the Old Vic, and to become a permanent feature of Massingham films) cringes with toothache moments after Peter Copley (another Old Vic actor) serves him a plate of roast chicken. After taking a taxi to his dentist in a whirlwind manner recalling *Rien Que Les Heures* and *Berlin*, he sits in the waiting room, contemplating the horrid future (the waiting room and surgery belonged to Massingham's own dentist).

Leafing through copies of *The Bystander* (the only magazine available), Waters finds that all its advertisements feature teeth, and he blacks in some of those belonging to a tauntingly smiling lady. Once seated in the dentist's chair, he is regaled with small talk: 'Been to any of the test matches this season? Seen *The Bystander*?' But the dreaded drill soon emerges, the dentist variously advising his frightened patient that the drilling won't hurt, may hurt and definitely will hurt. Waters' agony is conjured up by rapid-fire shots of his streaming eyes, a train puffing furiously, a bubbling rush of water and a foot lurching forward on to a car accelerator. Later, after he's told that it definitely will hurt, the image blackens and forms an abstract pattern—a bright circular whirl dwindling away to a comma. The grim twenty-minute epic concludes with shots of Waters, glassy-eyed, mulling over the prospect of an extraction.

While *Tell Me If It Hurts* slightly labours its material, *And So To Work*—shot in the same terse, subjective style—is so packed with detail that it's difficult to keep pace with events. Waters is featured again, and is once more the mild man under attack (a characterisation Massingham himself picks up later in his career). Every footstep he takes brings a calamity: the toothpaste squirts out of an alien hole in the toothpaste tube; the bathroom is occupied; when getting dressed, his key and small change fall out of his trouser pockets and one item hides under a dresser. On reaching the breakfast table, he finds that the other lodgers (an odious bunch) have consumed most of the food and filched his cutlery; just as he says 'Will you pass the toast?', someone predictably helps himself to the last slice. All in all, *And So To Work* is a meticulously detailed essay in domestic frustration—quite the equal of *It's a Gift*, or the situations concocted by Alan Simpson and Ray Galton for Tony Hancock. Yet Massingham's experimental style to some extent hampers the movie: Urbahn's stark lighting and the elliptical, many-angled shots

all ensure that the full comic potential of the material remains curiously stunted, providing the spectator with his own frustrations.

In his third independent film, the ten minute *Come for a Stroll* (1938), style and subject are more in accord. The film also spotlights Massingham's obvious fondness for grim jests, and takes its cue from the phrase 'Where every prospect pleases and only man is vile.' The prospect indeed pleases—we see shot after shot of rolling English countryside, beautiful enough to be extolled by H. J. Massingham. But the film's two characters put a blight on the landscape. Towzer (played by Arthur Brander) is as hideous as the lodgers in *And So To Work*; Massingham concentrates with great glee on the man's tics—the noisy way he blows his nose, his habits of picking his fingernails, scratching his back, and stabbing his companion in the chest with a finger. The companion, Martin (played by Philip Morant), is an author, who becomes so incensed by Towzer's obnoxiousness that he spins a tale of murder in which Towzer seems to be the intended victim. Events build up to a possible drowning, as in *An American Tragedy*; Towzer, thoroughly frightened, is last seen swimming away from the rowing boat, caught by an artistic shaft of sunlight.



Communications breakdown: 'How to Use the Telephone' (1948)

Massingham's jagged visuals perfectly match the unsettling activities of his characters, particularly when they stop their nightmare stroll to smoke cigarettes—their two heads swinging in and out of the frame from opposite sides.

But with *Come for a Stroll*, Massingham's personal experiments with film came to a premature end; with few exceptions, all his succeeding work was in the field of sponsored documentaries. His first assignments were for the GPO Film Unit; a fruitful venture, one might imagine, given the Unit's progressive artistic leanings. Yet the films that emerged are surprisingly tedious—*At the Third Stroke* (1939, promoting TIM the speaking clock), *Mony a Mickle* (1938, co-directed by Norman McLaren, promoting the Savings Bank)—with *Daily Round* (1937, with Russell Waters as a postman) remaining the best of a bad bunch. The humour is too strained for comfort, the propaganda message too flimsy; for all their brevity, the films seem to last an age. But once Massingham began supplying product during the war for the newly created Ministry of Information, his peculiar talents flourished once more.

Wartime film propaganda in Britain was a unique phenomenon and deserves a thorough investigation all its own. Two, five and fifteen-minute films were produced

to cover every aspect of life on the Home Front and to tie in with all the major Government advertising campaigns: Dig for Victory, Lend a Hand on the Land, Careless Talk Costs Lives, Make Do and Mend. Reluctant housewives were told about the glories of the wartime diet, the versatility of carrots or the National Wheatmeal Loaf (coloured a repellent grey); they were urged to save rubber and unwanted paper, to walk about at night wearing something white. The very titles of the films told all, with comic bluntness—*Keeping Rabbits for Extra Meat*, *Here We Go Gathering Spuds*, *Salvage of Tin Tubes*.

Cinema exhibitors were requested rather than forced to show this mass of well-meaning celluloid: apart from the incentive of helping in the war effort, financial carrots were dangled—the films were supplied free, and they also helped the exhibitor fulfil his quota obligations. Outside the city cinemas, the product was screened in mobile vans and local halls. Quality, however, hardly kept up with quantity: when the words 'Ministry of Information' loomed up in the darkness, audiences often groaned audibly, and cinema managers devised various ways of reducing their pain. The films were shown with the house lights up while the

obstacles by using an immediately recognisable, witty and elegant style (best remembered are his Careless Talk posters—one of which features Hitler and Goering solemnly sitting a few seats behind two gossiping women in a bus). Massingham's style was never elegant, but it was always witty and always recognisable; the humour, moreover, was cleverly derived from Massingham's pose as a man in the street just as forgetful, obtuse and resistant to propaganda as Fougasse's specimen.

The delightful *Pedestrian Crossings* (1948, directed by Michael Law) opens by presenting Massingham's credentials as the common man's mouthpiece. 'Now Mr. A. is a perfectly straightforward kind of person,' the narrator says. 'He reacts quite normally when there's dried egg for breakfast' (Massingham shrivels his face up in extreme disgust at this unpopular wartime attraction), 'when it's opening time' (Massingham performs a beaming grin), 'when his mother-in-law comes to stay' (the eyes look upwards, despairing), 'when he sees his bank balance' (the eyes pop outwards, amazed), 'when someone slips on a banana skin' (a hearty, cruel laugh), 'when he has bacon for breakfast' (the lips are licked at this rationed delight). 'But when it comes to

(for the newly formed Ministry of National Insurance in 1948, directed by John Krish) he has to scribble down his Insurance number on everything within reach—from a tablecloth and a shop window to a railway engine.

But the propaganda trailers not only suited Massingham's screen character (a slightly exaggerated version of himself in normal life); they also proved a fine showcase for his halting style of performing and shooting. Jokes and bits of business never build, but are presented separately in consecutive scenes, like numbered examples in a lecture or textbook. To prove that pedestrians shouldn't dawdle, *Pedestrian Crossings* offers the splendid sight of Massingham straddling the road asleep on an iron bedstead, a chair by his side piled high with clothes; we then see him eating breakfast, armed with teapot and paper, and watch with delight as a car rams into his table. The *Coughs and Sneezes* series presents another marvellous gallery of images, showing Massingham as an inveterate sneezer to whom handkerchiefs are an unknown quantity. We see him sniffing one cautiously, using it to polish furniture and a pear from his pear tree; incensed at his uncouthness, people throw a bucket of water



Left: 'What a Life': '... two men so depressed by the conditions of life in England ...' Right: 'Another Case of Poisoning'

audience was leaving, coming in or filling up with a double-feature supply of food; the trailer-length variety, which came attached to the end of the newsreels, were projected with the screen tabs closed; some weren't shown at all.

And the film-maker had his own set of problems. The budgets were slender but the amount of red tape tremendous, most of it being displayed at script conferences or rough-cut viewings when the sponsors voiced criticism for the sake of it. The biggest problem, however, was making audiences digest the required message, rule or regulation. The cartoonist, illustrator and poster artist Fougasse (Cyril Kenneth Bird) neatly analysed the obstacles which had to be overcome before any information penetrated the brain of the man in the street. First, there was 'a general aversion to reading any notice of any sort; secondly, a general disinclination to believe that any notice, even if it was read, can possibly be addressed to oneself; thirdly, a general unwillingness, even so, to remember the message long enough to do anything about it.' He himself overcame these

the everyday business of crossing the road ...'—and we see Massingham rushing into the road, being knocked down with ridiculous promptness by a passing car. The narrator then slowly instructs him in the ways and means of using a pedestrian crossing; when he reaches the other side in one piece, the occasion is celebrated on the soundtrack by a rousing orchestral chord and much applause.

In other films, more extravagant measures have to be taken to ensure that Massingham gets the message. 'Yes, I suppose I am a bit absent-minded at times!' he says in *Watch Your Meters* (directed by John Waterhouse and made for the Ministry of Fuel in 1947, when economies were needed just as much as in wartime)—and proves his forgetfulness by lying in a bath fully dressed and smoking a pipe, cigar and cigarette all at the same moment. We then see his living room, festooned with signs bearing the title phrase; a gramophone reiterates it, and a mallet emerges from the left side of the frame to hit him squarely on the head, further driving the message home. In *What's In a Number*

at him, and goad him into using his handkerchief by shaking a ludicrously outsize pepper-pot over his head.

But trailers formed only a part of Massingham's total output: as production head of Public Relationship Films, he accepted many bread-and-butter documentary projects simply to keep everyone occupied. Thus one finds Massingham's name connected with thoroughly dull affairs like *Surfing in Small Boats* (made for the Admiralty in 1948 and known to its technical crew under the alternative title *Suffering in Small Boats*) or *Personal Hygiene* (1948, made for the Army Kinema Corporation)—though the part he played in their actual filming was minute. And he himself served as writer and director on a fair number of conventional films, in which the only jokes are purely unintentional. Looking at *Family Doctor* (made in 1944 for the British Medical Association), one finds it hard to believe that the person who ribbed one branch of the medical profession in *Tell Me If It Hurts* (and had his film temporarily banned because of it) could be so insufferably cosy

and pious about another. The soundtrack also contrasts sharply with Massingham's earlier experimental manner: instead of isolated, exaggerated sound effects, action is accompanied by the constant sound of snippets from totally unsuitable classics—when an anxious husband paces in a corridor waiting for his wife to give birth, we hear the buoyant sounds of the finale to Sibelius' *Karelia* suite.

Yet at other times in the longer sponsored films, Massingham's method of treatment seems almost too ingenious and idiosyncratic. In *Which We Live* (1943, for the Board of Trade's Make Do and Mend campaign) is based on the dangerous conceit of a man's suit of clothes narrating its own life story—from the moment of purchase, through good times, bad times, care and neglect, concluding in death under the housewife's scissors. As the housewife makes her incision, planning to convert the material into two pairs of short trousers for the children, the suit quotes Shakespeare: 'To sleep, perchance to dream . . .'—at which point the whole affair becomes unpalatably whimsical. Yet the film has a cogency rare in films personally directed by Massingham, and the propaganda points about the ways of keeping a suit in tip-top condition are put over with agreeable neatness.

Facts and Fancies (directed by Michael Law for the Gas Council in 1950) presents its chosen message in a far more frenzied manner. Massingham again plays the man in the street, refusing to acknowledge that the by-products of gas have anything to do with him. However, an emissary from Mr. Therm (Russell Waters) takes him on a fast-motion tour of Beekton gasworks, gabbling information about the use of gas in mothballs, aspirins, chocolate flavouring and other essentials. Finally, Massingham is shown a world without by-products: his gargling mixture vanishes before his very eyes, the nylons of his teenage daughter (played by Joan Collins) desert her legs, and Massingham is left standing bereft of suit and trousers. While the film manages to wring more laughs out of gas than Paul Rotha's elaborately tongue-in-cheek *New Worlds For Old* (produced for the Realist Film Unit in 1938), Massingham's facts and fancies aren't properly balanced, and both eventually become monotonous.

However, when the subject matter was congenial, Massingham could still strike and sustain the right note of humour, most notably in *What a Life* (1948, directed by Michael Law) and *The Cure* (1950), both of which refreshingly hark back to his personal films of the 1930s. Although *What a Life* emerged under the Central Office of Information banner, its propaganda message is curiously oblique—so much so that questions were asked about the film in the House of Commons. Massingham and Waters play two businessmen assailed everywhere they go by bad news and long faces: Massingham suffers a miserable breakfast (shades of *And So To Work*), the newspaper headlines are dire, and even taxi-drivers look glum ('Everybody's gloomy these days—why should I be out of fashion?'). Finally, they decide to end their communal miseries and sail out to sea, armed with millstones and a remarkably stiff Union Jack. They clutch hands in a fond farewell, cast a last glance at the setting sun and fall overboard, only to

land in shallow water. Life, they then discover, isn't as ghastly as they thought, and they return to shore with renewed vigour.

The concluding moments of uplift, of course, provided the film's *raison d'être*, though Conservative M.P.s were quick to point out that the real stress lay in other areas. 'Has the Lord President seen this film?' the Conservative Member for Twickenham, Mr. E. H. Keeling, asked Herbert Morrison (duly reported in *Hansard* of February 15th, 1949). 'Does he know that it shows two men so depressed by the conditions of life in England today that they try to drown themselves, but make a mess of it? Does he really think that this is the sort of film on which £9,000 of the tax-payers' money should be spent—without any possibility of a return?' Morrison countered—to little effect—that Keeling had given a 'very short and incomplete critical review of the film,' and the debate continued for several minutes in a manner silly enough to have come from a Massingham study of bureaucratic follies.

In *The Cure* (the only Public Relations film to have no sponsor) Massingham draws as never before on his own personal characteristics for generous debunking. He plays a health fiend who becomes a raging hypochondriac after succumbing to lumbago—a situation which allows Massingham to pull some of his most exquisitely rueful faces, as he eats his meals forlornly standing by the mantelpiece or waits with increasing despondency as two doctors spout gobbledegook and forget to examine him. The style, as usual, is jagged, yet the material proves strong enough to prevent the film from disintegrating and, for once, there's an effective finale: after the lumbago is cured by an accidental fall downstairs, Massingham embarks on a celebratory display of athletics—crawling along the floor on all fours, pulling his wife (plus carpet) along the hallway, sliding up and down a ladder in the garden.

By the early 1950s, Britain's film industry was stuck in the doldrums and the new Conservative government proved less receptive to the use of film as an information service, rashly abolishing the Crown Film Unit in 1952 on grounds of economy. Later on, the field of sponsored films opened up again, and one wonders what Massingham would have achieved in the new world of television. But at the time of his death in 1953, his career was at a low ebb, and his last productions are ominously weak. The children's film *To the Rescue* (co-directed by Jacques Brunius) won an award at Venice, yet its charms are limited. The general atmosphere is pleasingly quaint and Brunius himself is a delightful villain, Gallic and elegant enough to have stepped out of the 1930s comedies of Renoir and Prévert. But one can't help noticing the poverty of imagination behind the script and direction. Half the film is a chase—a stock ingredient in children's films—yet it is handled with a notable lack of panache (a far better chase, paradoxically, occurs in the burglar prevention film *Help Yourself*).

As for *The Blakes Slept Here* (also co-directed by Jacques Brunius; Massingham died a few days after viewing the rough-cut), the film is a grotesque memorial. It was



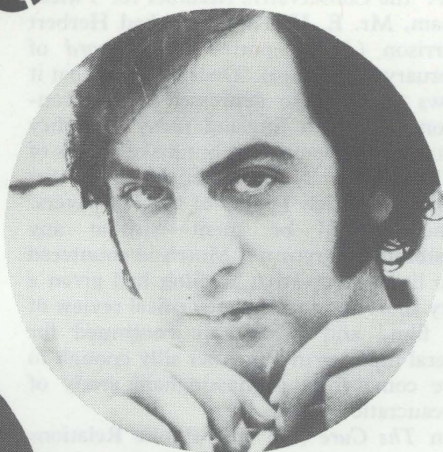
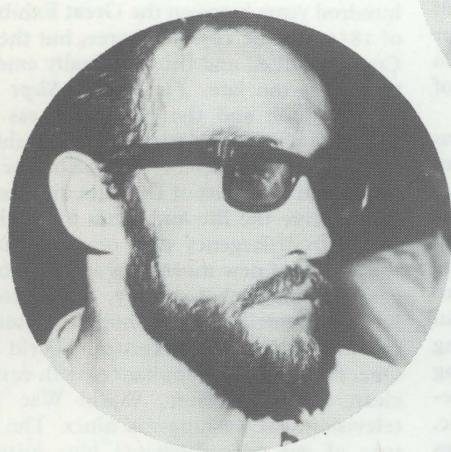
The burglar (John Salew) in 'Help Yourself'

originally planned as a Festival of Britain attraction showing the progress of gas in the hundred years between the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the 1951 jamboree, but the Gas Council dallied and the film finally emerged two years too late. *The Blakes Slept Here* has the look and the ponderousness of a conventional British costume film—shot in three-strip Technicolor, with elaborate sets, props, and a cast list of DeMille dimensions. We observe the life and times of the Blake family from Regency days onwards, noting the arrival of new inventions and fashions—gas lighting, photography, gas cookers, horseless carriages, telephones, Lumière's moving pictures, suffragettes, World War One, radio sets, gas appliances with easy-to-clean enamel surfaces, World War Two, television, gas washing-machines. The mixture of gas advertisements plus historical cavalcade proves pleasantly preposterous (one begins to wonder whether the poor family suffers from a hereditary disease—they have gas so much on the brain), yet the inflated sumptuousness of the film is disturbing. One looks back fondly to films like *Pedestrian Crossings*, when Massingham, a pedestrian crossing and a few passing cars were all the things required to punch home the sponsor's message, at a fraction of the cost and a fraction of the time, and with far greater imagination.

Richard Massingham in 'To the Rescue'



IN LATIN AMERICA



THEY SHOOT FILM-MAKERS

Peter Biskind

Some ten years ago, riding a wave of revolutionary enthusiasm, a new, vigorous Latin American cinema suddenly emerged. Glauber Rocha, working in Brazil's Cinema Novo movement, gave us films like *Antonio das Mortes* and *Black God, White Devil*. Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, working in Argentina's Cinema Liberacion movement, produced *The Hour of the Furnaces*. Bolivia's Jorge Sanjines made *Blood of the Condor*, an exposé of sterilisation programmes carried out by the Peace Corps among Bolivian Indians. From Cuba there was Tomas Gutierrez Alea's *Memories of Underdevelopment* and Humberto Solas' *Lucia*. And from Chile, Miguel Littin's *The Jackal of Nahueltoro*.

Now, just as suddenly, this movement has vanished. With the exception of Cuba, the Latin American film scene has become a wasteland. National cinemas come and go, for a whole variety of complex reasons, but in the case of Latin America the cause seems fairly clear. Many of the most promising film-makers are in prison or in exile or dead. In country after country, as right-wing regimes fought to retain or recover

their power, governments have clamped down on cultural workers—poets, singers, journalists, playwrights and film-makers. In Latin America, culture is as much a battleground as are the factories or the streets. The experience of colonisation has taught its victims that culture is an instrument of class domination. According to Andres Racz, a young Chilean film-maker and former critic for *Chile Hoy*, 'the government hates the artist as much as it hates the revolutionary, because it realises that they are the same.'

The plight of Latin American film-makers is most evident in Chile, where the revolutionary process was furthest advanced and the reaction against it most brutal. The Junta's attack on film-makers must be seen as part of a larger effort to recapture Chilean culture for the middle-class. When Allende was elected in 1970, Chilean media transmitted cultural images manufactured in the United States. *Time* magazine, no friend of Allende's Chile, reported that the leading right-wing daily, *El Mercurio*, received a generous subsidy from the CIA. More than half the programmes on Santiago's leading

Left, below: Jorge Sanjines, exiled from Bolivia
Left: Miguel Littin, exiled from Chile

TV channel, including *The Untouchables*, *The FBI*, *Mission Impossible* and *Disneyland*, were produced in the US. Until 1972 over 80 per cent of the movies shown on Chilean screens came from Hollywood. The USIA diverted students and intellectuals with festivals of avant-garde film-makers such as Brakhage and Warhol.

When the United States imposed its 'invisible blockade' of the Allende government, only two kinds of goods continued to flow into Chile: weapons for the military and cultural commodities for the Chilean media. As the revolutionary forces gained momentum, a vigorous popular culture, inspired by the example of Cuba, emerged to confront the official culture. Colourful wall paintings, songs performed by Victor Jara and Angel Parra, agit-prop posters, 'people's' comics, a flood of inexpensive books from the newly nationalised State Publishing House, and home-produced films chased Donald Duck, Elliot Ness and Dirty Harry out of the country.

The Allende government immediately recognised the importance of film. Chile Films, the state film company organised in 1941, ceased churning out ersatz imitations of Hollywood romances, and turned to the production of documentaries, newsreels and features intended to serve the process of social transformation. Miguel Littin, whose *Jackal of Nahueltoro* had been completed before Allende was elected, became head of the Chilean film industry and produced a stunning feature, *Promised Land*, completed in Cuba just before the coup. Raul Ruiz directed four or five features, but much of the energy and money went into documentaries and newsreels. Films like *A Half Litre of Milk* (on a food programme for the poor) or *Operation Winter* (on a project to help shanty town dwellers whose shacks were washed away in winter rains) publicised government programmes and showed the people to themselves, for the first time the agents of history rather than its victims.

Production was only the beginning. Newsreels and documentaries had to reach their target, in many cases people who had never seen a film before. Like other Latin American countries, Chile was well endowed with cinémathèques, located in the universities and catering, before Allende, to the art house tastes of students and intellectuals. As the cultural struggle intensified, the content and orientation of the cinémathèques began to change. The intellectuals who had hitherto been content to contemplate passively the felicities of Bergman, Fellini, Antonioni and Truffaut gradually came to see these films as irrelevant to their needs and the needs of the people, which were also becoming their own. Armed with portable generators, projectors and films, they travelled to shanty towns, factories and mines. Eisenstein, Vertov and Dovzhenko replaced Bergman and Truffaut. They showed Biberman's *Salt of the Earth*, Buñuel's *Los Olvidados*, Vigo, Renoir, and Cuban and Vietnamese films. Even *Citizen Kane* was screened for factory workers.

With the coup, all this activity ceased. Film-makers became the targets of arrests,

detention and torture. In June, during the first coup attempt, Argentine cameraman Hans Herman was shot and killed by right-wing troops attacking the governmental palace. Herman actually managed to film his own death; the footage has been used in several newsreels. An American filmmaker, Charles Horman, was taken from his home and shot to death in the National Stadium, where thousands of people were detained in the first days after the coup. Some workers in the film industry, like Hugo Jaramillo, were killed. Many were arrested, tortured and released, like Guillermo Cahn, Adriana del Rio Lazarrigue, Marcello Romo (who appeared in *The Jackal of Nahueltoro*) and Ivan San Martin (who was in Costa-Gavras' *State of Siege*). Others are still in prison, like Maximo Gedda, Gladys Diaz and José Carrasco Tapia.

Over fifty film-makers, including Littin and Ruiz, left Chile in the months after the coup. Others decided to remain and continue to work within the country, at great risk. Among them were Carmen Bueno and Jorge Muller, who have since 'disappeared'. The Junta refuses to divulge their whereabouts, even to acknowledge that they have been arrested. Carmen Bueno is a 25-year-old actress who appeared in the closing sequence of *Promised Land* where, in a strangely prophetic moment, she is cut down by troops, her naked body bathed in her own blood. Jorge Muller is a 27-year-old cameraman who worked on Patricio Guzman's documentary *The First Year*, Saul Landau and Haskell Wexler's *Brazil: a Report on Torture*, Raul Ruiz's *The Penal Colony*, Landau's *Que Hacer* and Littin's *Promised Land*. In November 1974, while working on a documentary, they were forced into a car by members of the Chilean secret police.

Two people recently released from Tres Alamos concentration camp have reported that both Bueno and Muller are being held at the camp. Both have been beaten and tortured with electric shock. One former prisoner reported that for several weeks Carmen Bueno 'was taken daily to long torture sessions'. Bueno's name has recently appeared on a list released by the Junta of 119 Chileans allegedly killed in Argentina by security guards or by rival leftist factions. A report in the *New York Times* suggests that this story has no basis in fact. Observers fear that the list was fabricated as a cover for future executions, or for those already carried out.

Thousands of feet of newsreel footage in the Chile Films archives, showing the strikes, factory take-overs, workers' councils, land seizures, rallies, marches and other manifestations of the political ferment of the Allende period, have been burned. Chile Films itself is to be sold to private investors. The new head of the Cinematheque of the University of Chile also works for the USIA. More than half the downtown cinemas in Santiago have been closed, because of the inflation which now makes film-going a luxury. 'People have nothing to eat,' says Racz, 'so they can hardly go to the movies.' *Cabaret*, *The Godfather* and *Clockwork Orange* have been the biggest grossers. According to a *New York Times* report on conditions in a Santiago shanty-town that had been solidly

behind Allende, one man who described himself as a former Marxist, 'ripped down the socialist calendars and slogans that hung on walls of his two-room wooden shack. In their place, he put up some posters of Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse.' American cultural hegemony has been resumed.

The grim tale of film-makers in Chile is repeated in country after country. In Bolivia, Felix Gomez, cameraman for the UKAMAU film group which produced *Blood of the Condor*, was jailed in August 1971. Later that year the cameraman on *Hour of the Generals* was machine-gunned by soldiers while filming the army's takeover of a mine. Jorge Sanjines, head of the Bolivian Institute for Cinema from 1966 to 1968, went into exile in 1971 along with most of the UKAMAU group; there has been no significant film activity in Bolivia since. In June 1975, Antonio Eguino, director of photography for UKAMAU, was arrested for possession of a print of the Italian television documentary *The Courage of the People*, which he had shot.

In Uruguay, Walter Achugar and Eduard Terra, co-founders of the Third World Cinematheque, were arrested in 1972 as part of a government drive against the Tupamaros and their 'urban network'. Both were tortured. Achugar's wife was forced to listen to tape recordings of her husband's screams. Achugar was released after two months; Terra is still in prison. The film collection of the Cinematheque, one of the largest in Latin America, was destroyed. Mario Handler, who directed six short films, left the country in 1973 after being targeted for assassination by the Death Squad. The team of film-makers who made *In the Jungle There is Lots to Do*, an animated short for children, were forced to leave in 1974.

In Colombia, in 1972, four film-makers, Carlos and Julia Alvarez, Gabriella Samper and Manuel Vargas, were arrested for making films 'inciting to commit crime and violence'. Their films were seized as 'dangerous materials'.

In Brazil, the entire staff of the Museum of Modern Art in Rio were twice arrested. The police destroyed the film collection in the Museum's vaults, chopping films

like *Battleship Potemkin* into small pieces. Glauber Rocha went into exile in 1969. Although many film-makers stayed, and are now working, they make what are called *chanchadas*, 'pig-films'. Recently, the army stated that Vladimir Herzog, news director of TV Cultura, the state-owned educational television station, committed suicide after being interrogated by the security forces. Although accustomed to the sudden disappearance of friends and acquaintances, journalists, students and opponents of the regime have nevertheless challenged the army's version of the incident.

In Argentina, Julio Troxler, featured in Solanas' *The Hour of the Furnaces*, was shot to death by the right-wing Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance (AAA). Solanas' group went underground for two months, then issued a statement in support of Isabel Peron. According to Rodi Broullon of Tricontinental Film Centre, the largest distributor of Third World films in the United States, most Argentine films are heavily censored, both at the pre-production script stage and after completion. 'Those that are not banned are bombed,' said Broullon. The AAA and other right-wing groups attack theatres showing films that 'insult the military'. Film laboratories scrutinise film that comes in to be processed, to make sure that it is not subversive.

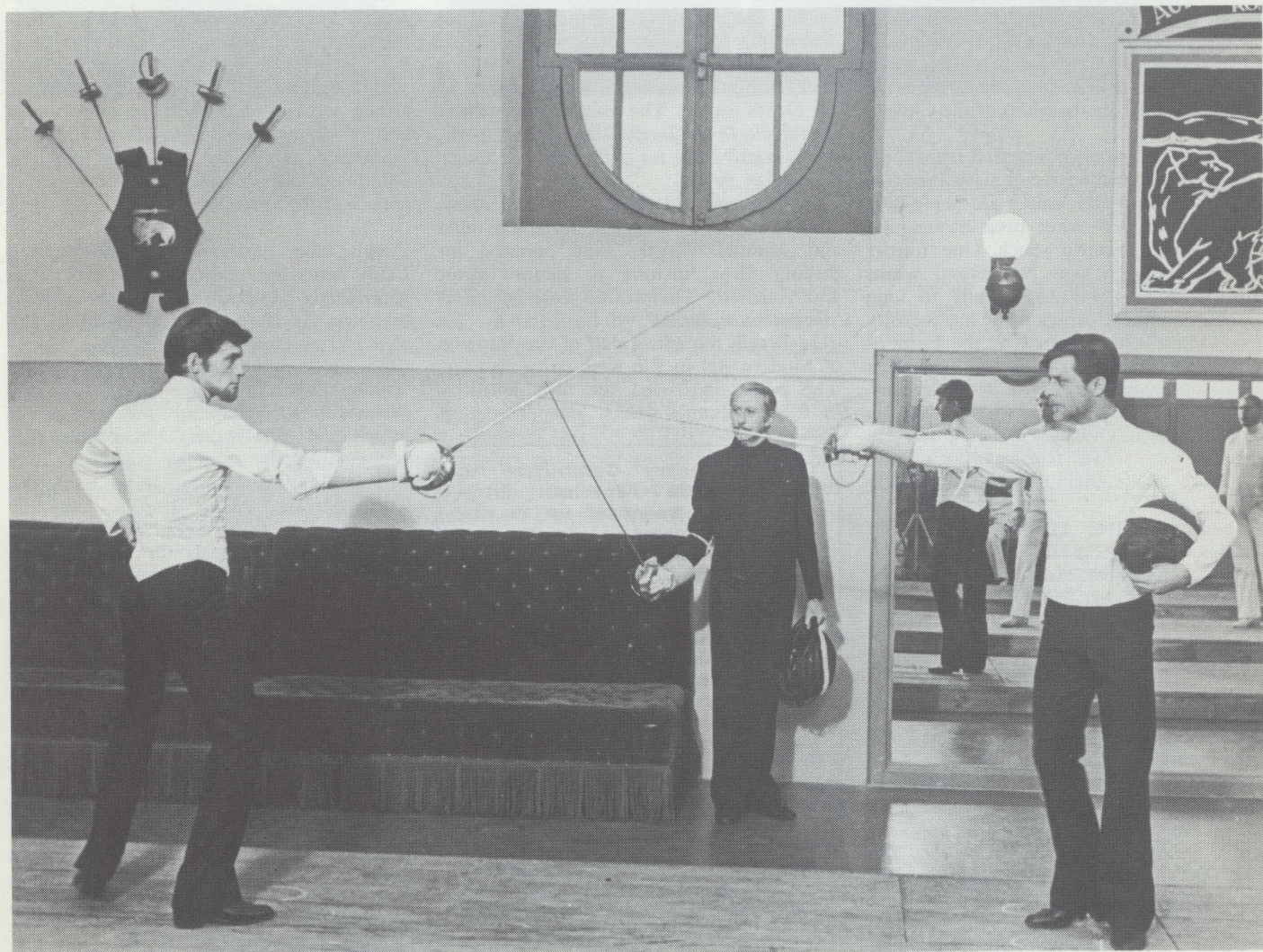
Rodi Broullon says that repression in Argentina has reached such a point that it takes as much time and preparation to arrange a clandestine screening of a film in a *barrio* as it would to carry out an action against a bank. 'Someone brings the projector, five more people bring little ten-minute rolls in their pockets, assemble the film on the spot, screen it, break it down again, and disappear. You need so much armed security to protect an audience of two or three hundred people that film is becoming a liability in mass struggle. Pamphlets and newspapers are cheaper to make and easier to distribute.'

Despite the harshness of authoritarian Latin American regimes, they have been surprisingly responsive to international pressure. As Racz put it, 'they're lackeys of world opinion because of their dependence on foreign capital.' In the past, letter-writing campaigns have been strikingly successful in obtaining the release of imprisoned film-makers. European film personalities like Simone Signoret, Yves Montand, Costa-Gavras, Jorge Semprun, Chris Marker, Alain Resnais, Jean-Luc Godard and others have frequently lent their names to appeals for clemency. In the United States, the Emergency Committee to Defend Latin American Film-makers has been particularly active on behalf of Carmen Bueno and Jorge Muller.

Despite the repression, film-making in Latin America will continue. A few countries still provide relative freedom and safety for political refugees. Littin is working in Mexico, others in Peru, Venezuela and Cuba. Clandestine film-making is still possible in Argentina and countries where the left is strong. And it is certain that, when the Chilean Junta and regimes like it are destroyed, Latin American cinema will flourish once more, fulfilling the revolutionary promise of the popular movements that produced it. ■

The Emergency Committee to Defend Latin American Film-makers has been set up to disseminate information on the repression of film-makers in Latin America, and to mobilise support for their defence and survival. Many members of the American film community, like Francis Ford Coppola, Arthur Penn, Elia Kazan, Jack Nicholson, John Simon, Judith Crist and Jon Voight, along with European directors Werner Herzog, Jean Marie Straub, Volker Schlöndorff, Jorn Donner, have joined the Committee in its efforts to obtain the release of Carmen Bueno and Jorge Muller. Inquiries should be addressed to the Emergency Committee to Defend Latin American Film-makers, 339 Lafayette Street, New York, New York 10012, USA.

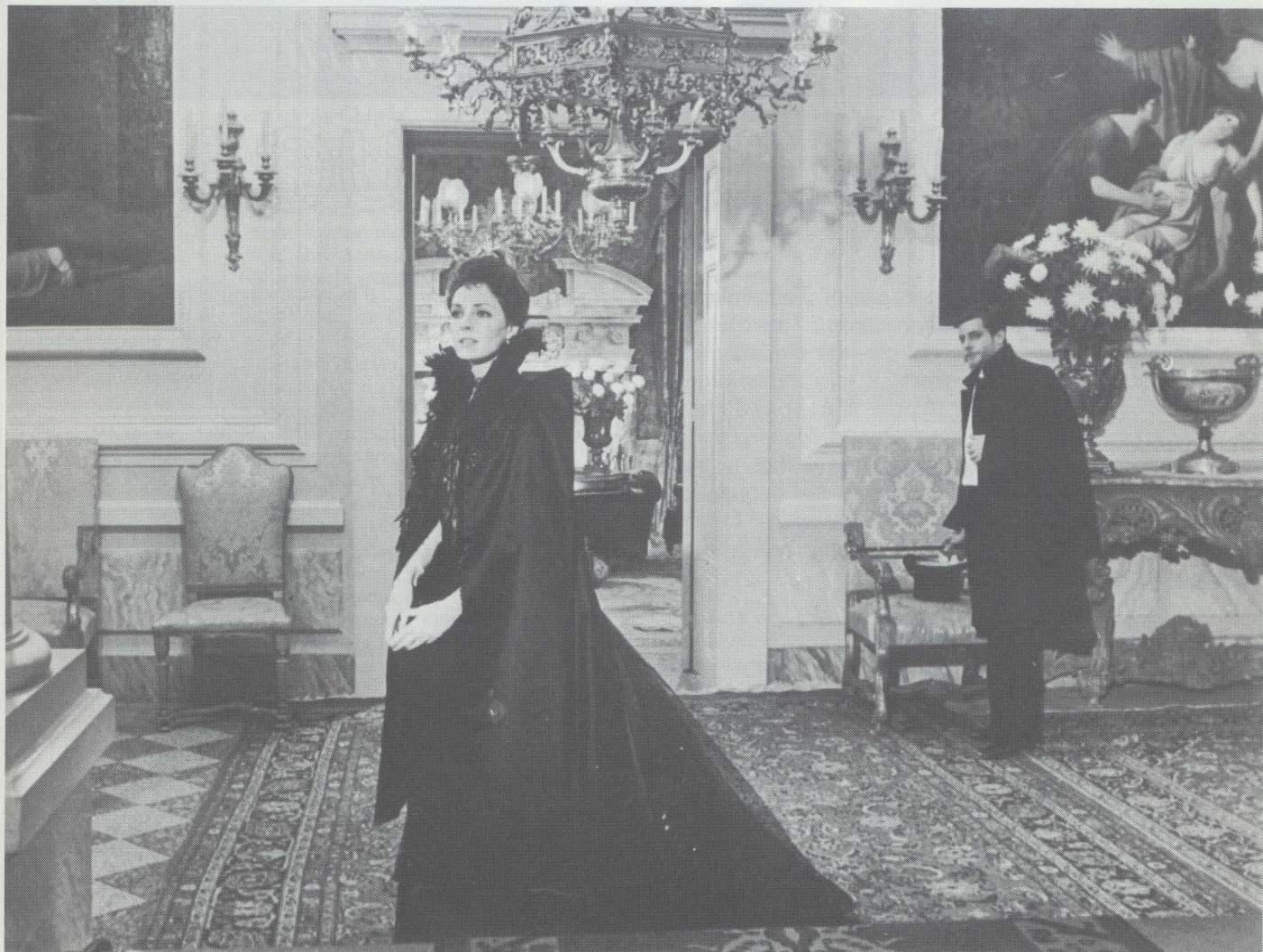
Luchino Visconti (1906~1976)





L'Innocente

Luchino Visconti (left, directing *Death in Venice*) was born on February 11, 1906 and died on March 17, 1976. His last film, *L'Innocente*, scripted with his long-term collaborator Suso Cecchi d'Amico, is based on a novel by D'Annunzio and features Laura Antonelli, Giancarlo Giannini (below) and Jennifer O'Neil (below) in a characteristically melodramatic intrigue. Visconti directed this sombre, elegant film from a wheel-chair; not another *Senso*, but an outstanding example of what Hemingway would have called grace under pressure.





A Japanese Romantic:

TEINOSUKE KINUGASA

Robert Cohen

With the rediscovery several years ago of Teinosuke Kinugasa's silent masterpiece *A Page of Madness* (*Kurutta Ippei*: distributed by Shochiku, 1926), a new intrigue was begun with the pre-war cinema of Japan. What most critics who have been to Japan have found is only a fraction of the original output; the greater portion destroyed by World War II and the fragility of early nitrate stock. Nevertheless, after seeing *A Page of Madness* and the equally extraordinary *Crossroads* (*Fujiro*: Shochiku, 1928), one wishes to know more about the man who made them, a director who was really only to impress foreign observers much later in 1953 with *Gate of Hell* (*Jigokumon*: Daiei). One wonders about the intervening productions, and how the Japanese industry was able to accommodate such apparent versatility.

The Japanese critic Tadao Sato has characterized Kinugasa as a master in the mould of a Henry King or a George Cukor: limited by choice of subject, but an expert at crafting fully satisfying individual films. Sato contends that Kinugasa saw himself as three people: a liberal, an artist and, simultaneously, an entertainer; able to do it all, make money and direct 'serious' films. Donald Richie concurs, and observes Kinugasa as a standard bearer for the Japanese industry, maintaining a high reputation without attracting more than minimal controversy. Kinugasa often went off on his own to make personal films which

left him broke, only to return to the majors and continue grinding out popular features.

Although Kinugasa did gain attention with his experimental films of 1926 and 1928, his first real accolades came during the same era from his work in the period film—the *jidai-geki*. He was known as an expert storyteller, and in his films of the 1920s and 1930s he created what became the archetypal Japanese romantic hero. These films of mythic heroism showed Kinugasa's ability to build mood and atmosphere, and he was regarded, along with Daisuke Ito and Sadao Yamanaka, as one of the finest makers of the action epic.

The not altogether flattering appraisals by Sato and Richie do little to diminish a desire to know more about Kinugasa's career, since his prominence is undeniable. It is rather obvious, however, that Kinugasa was fully creative in only a very few of his feature films. Richie has aptly called his style eclectic, and it is partly because of the variable stylistic nature of his separate films that there are reservations concerning his overall artistry; not incidentally, the same criticism is voiced in regard to his own social philosophy. Kinugasa's early experiments were in conjunction with the Japanese *avant-garde*, and paralleled the beginning of an attachment to proletarian causes which ostensibly continued throughout his career. This progressive tendency appears initially rather suspect, however, since Kinugasa not only made more than a hundred simple entertainment features, but also the general interpretation of his films is decidedly traditional.

We can go at least part of the way towards reconciling this problem by saying that his use of mood and atmosphere, the most pervasive attributes of his style, were his praxis for the ultimate power and burden of human emotion. At its most basic, Kinugasa

varied his film structure to express a motivation of character which was made consistent by the changing nature of emotion itself. Thus the environment of *A Page of Madness* determines the quality of the hero's actions to the same degree that chivalry and ancient morality dictate the course of action for the climax of *Gate of Hell*. Kinugasa created a system of emotional involvement based on an individual's capacity to respond to his immediate surroundings; larger themes, either social or anti-social, progressive or traditional, were relevant only to the degree to which they gave substance to his ideas of man's emotional involvement with himself and others.

The very few of Kinugasa's films that did go beyond convention are true masterpieces. What caused this limitation on creativity is his attachment to the theatre. Once again an ambiguity is involved, because in many of his better films Kinugasa brings in bits of theatrical action which stand out for their quality; and often these borrowings are expertly integrated within the film. In fact, he could well be known as one of the finest directors of 'theatrically related' films, somewhat in the order of a Cocteau or a Sacha Guitry. The problem seems to be that he never completely trusted the cinema alone to handle deep emotions. He was a classicist, who believed the theatre to be the grandfather of the performing arts, and this philosophy is quite compatible with ancient Japanese theoretical writing which saw the theatrical experience as the purest mode of expressing boundless emotion. Thus, *A Page of Madness* and *Gate of Hell* notwithstanding, Kinugasa opted for the theatre whenever the emotions with which he was dealing tended in his own mind to outweigh the possibilities of film. In classical situations he chose at least a semblance of classical structure, which meant the theatrical experience. Consequently, even though his *mise en scène* was often perfect, his style shifted from film to film to include almost any moment of emotional complexity. Because he evidently felt most at home sketching a view of the ambivalence of life, Kinugasa consistently made films submerged in disparate moods to suggest feelings above his own understanding, and he thought that of his audience.

Teinosuke Kinugasa was born Teinosuke Kogame in Mie Prefecture on January 1st, 1896. As a child, he worked for his father's rural tobacco business, rolling cigars and assisting in the processing of *kizami* tobacco. He was introduced to the theatre by his mother; his earliest recollections are of a *Yosei* comedy theatre near his home and of itinerant *kabuki* companies. At seventeen, he ran away to Nagoya and began the slow process of apprenticeship which leads in Japan to a life on the stage. He made his debut at nineteen, and like many other theatrical performers of the time, he worked simultaneously in the cinema. In 1918, the same year that he was performing with the Kadoza Theatre's *shimpa* company, he entered Nikkatsu as an *oyama* actor. He made his film debut in *The Seven Coloured Ring* (*Nanairo Yubi Wa*) directed by Chu Oguchi, making seven costume changes while playing the same character.

At the Nikkatsu Mukojima studios,

Kinugasa starred in Eizo Tanaka's *The Living Corpse* (*Ikeru Shikabane*), which marked the studio's first attempt at integrating cinematic techniques initially foreign to the Japanese film. American movies were at this time the greatest source of outside inspiration for the Japanese industry, and Kinugasa acknowledges the early influence of the Bluebird films for showing that elementary human psychology could be shown visually. From an original screenplay (written under a pseudonym), he directed his first film, *The Death of My Sister* (*Imoto No Shi*) in 1921, in which he also starred. It was a tragic melodrama about a girl who commits suicide in front of a train after being raped by her brother's best friend.

During the 1920s, Kinugasa worked primarily for Shochiku, which was fast attracting talent away from Nikkatsu and the multitude of theatrical companies. It was during this period that he was most active, and that his reputation was estab-

lished as an advocate of leftist causes, a leader of the cinematic *avant-garde* and a master of the period film. At Shochiku, Kinugasa quickly aligned himself with the struggles of the new unions of technicians and actors, leading the first mass walk-out in protest against the threatened replacement of the standard *oyama* by female actors. Simultaneously, Kinugasa joined a group of young artists (Yasunari Kawabata among others) to experiment with new forms of expression. It was out of this very typical Japanese enterprise that he produced his first two important films, *A Page of Madness* and *Crossroads*. In 1925 he made *The Sun* (*Nichirin*) for another independent company, The Film Art Alliance (Rengo Eiga Geijutsu Kaisha), and part of his apparent ideological ambiguity is here first in evidence. The film is about the age of the gods (the same controversial period as Shinoda's 1974 *Himiko*) and was subsequently suppressed because of its right wing sentiment. Shochiku was at least

Experiment in the 1920s: 'Crossroads' (also known in Europe as 'Crossways') and 'A Page of Madness'



ambivalent towards all this activity, since Kinugasa was then also the leading director of the extremely popular (and profitable) *denki-shosetsu* movement—the adaptation of the romantic novel.

Kinugasa chose Kazuo Hasegawa to star in these romanticised versions of history, and the two forged a working relationship which brought them unprecedented critical success throughout the 1920s and 30s. This association was largely responsible for elevating Kinugasa to equal prominence before the war with Mizoguchi, Ozu and Yamamoto, and established him as the pre-eminent creator of mood and romantic taste. The characters they created were by and large fictional portraits of historical figures, often adapted from the *kabuki* or newspaper serials. Their period films were of the type commonly called 'sword-fight' pictures, best illustrated by *The Revenge of Yukinojo* (*Yukinojo Henge*, 1935) remade in 1963 by Ichikawa as *An Actor's Revenge*. The collaboration between Hasegawa and Kinugasa continued even when critical praise did not; and the two were of course responsible for *Gate of Hell*, and are still associated today in Tokyo at the Toho Kabuki Theatre.

In 1926 Kinugasa made *A Page of Madness*, which is still the earliest successful 'experimental' film known in Japan. It was one of four films made for the independent Kinugasa Motion Picture League (Kinugasa Eiga Renmei), and was distributed by Shochiku at theatres reserved exclusively for the exhibition of foreign films. The film made money, but because initial financing had come from the pockets of the League members, no one got rich. Put together between assignments for Shochiku, the film was painstakingly edited in individual segments without a script, using the camera itself to play back each processed sequence. From the exposed original, according to Kinugasa, one version was edited and then carried by hand to each theatre. When the print wore out, a second, and then a third 'new' film was made in the same agonising manner. The version Kinugasa found some four years ago at his home is one of the original three, but he does not remember which.

An exceedingly clear narrative runs beneath *A Page of Madness*' divergent points of view. A woman has gone insane after attempting to drown herself and her child, and has been subsequently committed to an asylum. To be near, her husband hides his identity and having secured a job as janitor, attempts to communicate with the woman in the hope of reconciling their life together. Although Kawabata is given credit for the screenplay, it is more probable that he was responsible only for the original idea. Scenes were shot for their overall impression, and editing was done by a process of trial and error. The film as seen today is a *tour de force* of originality, its barrage of images assembled with extraordinary consistency.

A Page of Madness was designed as an experiment, and as such the film's unconventional treatment of subjective states of mind is the main concern. Its images of an altered inner reality, fantasy and simple metaphor are rendered as flashbacks, day-dreams and insane visions. Out of this mass of detail, Kinugasa achieves coherence by

creating a self-contained world for the film in which the general mood is dark and aggressive. The opening tempest prefaces the action, introducing a tone of violence and apprehension which serves as the only point of reference with which the audience can measure its level of comprehension. Thus each displacement of one character perspective with another is given equal visual weight, until the film's present tense injects the janitor into his own fantasies, and thereby creates a final crisis of controlled ambiguity.

Even though the link between the film's psychological subject matter and its freedom of style—the superimpositions, distorted camera angles and camera movement—owes something to German influences, there is no precedent, at least extant, in the Japanese cinema itself, which makes its maturity all the more surprising. The thread of consistency, however, is the film's marked visual texture and control. Like all major Japanese film artists, Kinugasa placed (consciously or not) an inordinate emphasis in his career on visual conception; and *A Page of Madness* achieves its power from the precision with which he selected, photographed and assembled his images. It is characteristic of the Japanese, however, that the film remained only an experiment, and the formal means of expression which it explored spawned no large movement, and never altogether intruded on the other arts.

The film provided enough aesthetic rewards for Kinugasa to allow him to continue working with his own company, and in 1928 he released *Crossroads*, which now stands alongside Osanai and Murata's *Souls on the Road* (1921) as one of the first major Japanese classics. Upholding his reputation as a master story-teller in the popular genre, Kinugasa again made use of a strong story line, and quite literally paved the way for the end of the melodramatic structure under the weight of a formalist orientation. All later attempts in Japan at using the psychology and emotion of melodrama were in essence attempts at adapting the form to the side of naturalism and realist design, with which Bazin's theories are most compatible.

The experimentation of *A Page of Madness* is carried on in *Crossroads* by the associational editing, the superimpositions which express the hero's fantasy and paranoia, and the use of flashbacks and the moving camera. Because of his weakness of character, the hero forsakes his responsibility to his sister and pursues a courtesan who treats him like a fool. The man is temporarily blinded in a fight with a rival, whom he believes he has killed. While the sister attempts to nurse him back to health, he recalls the horror of his deed and his humiliation at the hands of the woman. He eventually dies of a broken heart, while his sister has given up all her possessions and self-respect in the futile hope of preserving their meagre family.

The visual conception is again outstanding, and Kinugasa breaks up parts of the actors' bodies into separate shots, and isolates aspects of the set to comment on the psychological meaning. *Crossroads* is full of Eisensteinian moments (almost *kabuki*-esque abstractions), where parts of the action stand for the whole. What stands out most is actually the emphasis on the set, constructed in one piece as a large stage; in one

long shot, we see part of the set already used in scenes between the brother and sister in their room, and also other areas not shown before, but where much of the subsequent action will transpire. This one glimpse conveys the artificiality of the film as distinct from life, but is no less disconcerting than the analogous 'distortions' of showing the heroine's hands to suggest hopelessness, and her feet to show her painful acquiescence. This homage to the artifice of the theatre is first felt in *Crossroads*, and later will manifest itself with much greater force and dexterity.

In 1928 Kinugasa travelled to Russia to meet Eisenstein and was able to glimpse first-hand the Soviet film industry. The two met several times, accompanied by interpreters. Kinugasa did not show either *Crossroads* or *A Page of Madness* to the Soviet film-makers, having sent his copy of the former to Hamburg before leaving Japan. Kinugasa has recalled little during their meetings of the vituperative criticism of the Japanese film for which Eisenstein is famous in his essay, 'The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram', and their discussions seem to have centred instead on Eisenstein's manifesto on sound.

At the time of this visit, Eisenstein was shooting *The General Line* outside Moscow, and part of the reason for his brief return was to see the *kabuki* production brought to Russia by Shiro Kido of Shochiku and led by the actor Sadanji Ichikawa. Again accompanied by interpreters, Eisenstein and Kinugasa saw the production of *Chushingura*, the perennial classic, and the episode provided Kinugasa with a wonderful story of Eisenstein clapping him on the back, pointing to the scene and exclaiming, 'That is cinema!'

From Russia Kinugasa travelled on to Europe, where UFA screened *Crossroads* in 1929, and the film was released in Paris for an exclusive engagement the same year. Although it was a critical success, Kinugasa returned home at the end of the year nearly broke, and again took up his career at Shochiku.

Kinugasa retained his leftist associations, directing *Before Dawn* (*Reimei Izen*, 1931), one of the first 'tendency' films to begin the screen trek in Japan from social consciousness to realism. He was selected to make the first period talkie, *The Surviving Shinsengumi* (*Ikinokata Shinsengumi*) in 1932, and made *The Revenge of Yukinojo* with Kazuo Hasegawa in 1935. This last film was taken from the newspaper novel by Otokichi Mikami, and it still remains one of the biggest moneymakers in the entire history of Japanese cinema.

The story of Yukinojo, a famous actor of the Edo period (1615–1868), centres on his revenge for the suffering and eventual death of his parents. The film begins and ends on the stage, with Hasegawa, an expert *kabuki* actor, playing three roles. Kinugasa maintains an inspired interplay between the artificial formality of the *kabuki* and the psychological realism of the offstage action. He used the mechanical devices of the stage to lend a Mabuse-like quality to the opening scene, in which Hasegawa stands below the trap-door leading up to the *hanamichi*. The sound of the drum, heard to mark his entrance on stage, offers a note of mystery

and summons a vision of his mother, superimposed in front of him on the ropes and pulleys of the hidden stage. Her ironic advice to rest his desire for vengeance makes organic Kinugasa's use of a narrator throughout much of the film; and provides an impetus for his use of superimposition, and the visualisation of abstract patterns (a close-up of a turning spiral to denote dizziness, used also in *Crossroads*) to highlight the action outside the theatre. Kinugasa thus sought those elements within the film medium which were most compatible with the spirit and conventions of the *kabuki* as he perceived them; again creating a world which functions on its own terms.

As the film moves back and forth between the stage production and the machinations for revenge, most of the Yukinojo persona is in the guise of a woman. No doubt further conceptual harmony is added by the implicit tension created by this double personality, as generally the selection of the *kabuki* as the yardstick of perception for the film itself strengthens the dichotomy between actor

theatre to modify the action and plot, and to provide effects of character and atmosphere. The hero, initially a peaceful merchant, is drawn into violence and a life of hiding by the corruption of the local *samurai*, and avoids apprehension by joining a band of travelling actors. As he leads Hasegawa through the film, Kinugasa makes full use of costume and the theatrical performance, manages a charming bit of formula involving make-up turning to tears, and includes a chase sequence of hide-and-seek through the paraphernalia of the backstage setting. The film is full of invention, and was very popular if somewhat reminiscent of his rather facile series film, *The Sacred Protector* (*Hito Hada Kannon*, 1937), done in five parts for Shochiku.

At least one historical battle of the 16th century is known as Kawanakajima, and characteristically Kinugasa began here in fact for his fictional account of some of the participants. The hero, presumably a farmer, has been called into service by his

play with relish, in the end he continues to grasp the status not 'rightly' his, and wins over as confidant the real aristocrat who has intruded on the masquerade. The hero has nerve, and Kinugasa allows this independence to enchant the audience. Naturally love is also involved, and the simple girl he leaves behind is heartbroken, a sign in the structuralist sense of her divine melancholy, and another measure of the film's romantic aftertaste.

In 1947, Kinugasa contributed one section to the omnibus *The Story of Four Loves* (*Yottsu No Koi No Monogatari*), entitled *The Love Circus* (*Koi No Sakasu*). In it, he avoided all technical devices except the simple cut, relying on dialogue to paint an abstract vignette steeped in symbolism about a condemned man confronted by his past. In the same year, he did a film he called *Actress* (*Joyu*); and to some it was his last great critical success. The story was a biography of Sumako Matsui, the first great modern Japanese actress, whose dedication



Left: 'Kaikoku-ki', a period action film of 1928; right: 'Genroku Shushingura' (1932)

and character, Hasegawa and Yukinojo, reality and artifice. However well this might work in the abstract (and it certainly does), it also makes for glorious entertainment. Revivals of the film today are still sell-outs for housewives over forty, who remain the largest single group responsible for the continuing popularity of the *kabuki*. The Japanese audience is supremely accepting of convention, and it is to Kinugasa's credit that he conformed to these expectations with remarkable style and verve.

In the late 1930s, Kinugasa moved to Toho, like others lured away from Shochiku by prospects of greater personal freedom and increased salaries. This is the period of the Hasegawa incident, in which the actor received a gash on his cheek supposedly inflicted in retaliation for his pending move to the same studio. Shochiku retained control of his screen name, Chojiro Hayashi, and along with this switch also came the change to Hasegawa. The collaboration with Kinugasa continued, and they made *The Snake Princess* (*Hebi Himesama*) in 1940, *The Battle of Kawanakajima* (*Kawanakajima Kassen*) in 1941, and *Lord for a Night* (*Aru Yo No Tonosama*) in 1945.

The Snake Princess was a period film made in two parts, and Kinugasa again looked to

lord to fight; however, much of the screen time develops around his duties tending horses and supplies—an obligation he renders with such concern and compassion as to separate him from his fellows. When he dies in battle at the end of the film, it is meant as a salute to the ideals of chivalry, and a homage to the humanity buried deep within the concept of allegiance unto death which is part of the Japanese historical ethic. Although Kinugasa also relied on documented accounts of medieval warfare, his battle scenes contain a rare formal beauty which reinforces his romantic vision.

Lord for a Night was in many ways a departure for Kinugasa, being a high comedy, and containing an implicit criticism of the remnants of feudalism still active in contemporary Japanese society. As Richie and Anderson have pointed out, the film was set in the Meiji period (1868–1912) no doubt to avoid censorship, and at least part of the concealment is also due to the story-book opening and closing, in which paintings come to life and then return to the canvas. The film is shown as a fantasy: the hero is a musician at a large resort who is persuaded to impersonate a baron for the amusement of a group of businessmen on holiday. Although the protagonist distinguishes reality from the game he has learned to

to the theatre and to her director, Hogetsu Shimamura, was central to the development of the *shingeki* theatrical form, but ended in her own tragedy. Unable to endure the stigma of public opinion following the death of her married lover Shimamura, Matsui committed suicide in 1918. This scenario Kinugasa followed, and the film is as satisfying and powerful as any he ever made.

Kinugasa felt close to Shimamura, whose Art Theatre (Geijutsu Gekijo) was the first to introduce Ibsen and Tolstoy to the Japanese public. (Shimamura and Shoyo Tsubouchi were also the first Japanese translators of Shakespeare.) To ensure the right balance between screen and stage acting, and to pump freshness into his conception, Kinugasa sprinkled his cast and crew with established professionals from both media. He himself worked on the script, as did Eijiro Hisaita, who wrote for the stage while collaborating with Kurosawa on such films as *No Regrets for Our Youth* (1946) and *The Bad Sleep Well* (1960). He chose Isuzu Yamada to play Matsui, and Yoshi Hijikata as Shimamura; Hijikata was a theatre director, co-founder with Kaoru Osanai of the Tsukiji Small Theatre (Tsukiji Sho-gekijo), and influential in experimenting with new theatrical forms.

The first half of the film centres on the creation of the Art Theatre, with its classroom lectures on the realist philosophy which had just been imported from Europe. Kinugasa stresses the theme of old versus new, and mirrors the conflict through Matsui's liberated attitude towards her affair with Shimamura. To justify her actions, the actress repeats the director's teachings to live life fully and to act from experience in order to express artistic truth, simultaneously affirming the inadequacy of traditional constraints placed on the Japanese woman, and the concomitant piety towards the benevolence of the family structure. In reality, Matsui was considered by the Japanese to be their first real 20th-century woman, and her championship of a bohemian style offered quite an appeal for film versions of her life. (Mizoguchi's 1947 *The Love of Actress Sumako* is a further example.)

Another theme in the film is the problem of commercialism when trying to balance entertainment and art. Kinugasa views the controversy traditionally, portraying the businessmen as conservative when they are in control, and the stars as subject to fits of ego gratification when they have the upper hand. Before Shimamura opens his theatre, the only performance we see is an uninspired German opera, of which the Japanese show little understanding, and we suppose that the vogue for foreign adaptation has brought this production to Japan. Kinugasa of course contrasts this initial experience, meant to signify the progressive void out of which the *shingeki* comes, with scenes from Matsui's triumph as Nora in *A Doll's House* and Natasha in *Resurrection*. Soon after she is in control of the company, her need to play the classics convinces her to do *Carmen*, turning the other actors against her and bringing about her censure. The last performance in the film is of the avant-garde, *Before and After Death* (*Shi To Sono Zenko*), and once again the film asserts the integrity of innovation.

The question of artistic compromise is central to the film's structure, and links the themes of the first half with those centred round death in the second part. The play that Kinugasa chose to close with represents one of the first attempts in Japan to create a modern presentational theatre. Despite Kinugasa's rather obvious cutting back and forth between Matsui's death in the play, and Shimamura slowly passing away at home, the play within the film is noteworthy for its remarkable Cocteauesque images: the stage is continually darkened, divided into cloudy perspectives with Matsui's deathbed below surrounded by haze with death high above on his pedestal; the actors all in black wear skull masks; and at the end the angel of death leads Matsui out of her former life.

Despite the evident theatrical symbolism of these scenes from *Before and After Death*, Kinugasa remains characteristically cinematic throughout most of *Actress*. Matsui's actual death in the film is not shown on screen; instead, as a friend discovers her body off camera, behind the deserted stage, an old stage-hand appears, senses the meaning of the other man's cries and looks tearfully at the auditorium. In another scene, Matsui laments Shimamura's death by staring at his picture on the wall of his office. Outside it is raining, and Kinugasa

shoots through the window, which superimposes the water condensed on the pane over the tears on the actress's face.

If we can say that in Kinugasa's better films, the interplay between reality and illusion has been of major significance, it is evident that the expansion seen in *Actress* to include a direct commentary on the subject of death is an extension of the same theme. In both the examples given here, the primary emphasis is on seeing. The water for tears echoes back to traditional literary allusions of tears or dew splashing on to the sleeve of one who mourns; and if the link here between life and its emotions is a little too trite and precious, it nevertheless releases a certain level of tension implicit in the innate sensitivity of the average Japanese



'Actress': Yoshi Hijikata, Isuzu Yamada

viewer. The death off screen is an obvious problem of seeing, and by choosing not to show it, Kinugasa makes the death seem more real in contrast to the artificiality of the final play within the film. What Kinugasa is ultimately saying is that no matter how one might try to disguise the pain of life and understand the fact of death, there can never be any real reconciliation.

Actress is full of dark images, but the film is not pessimistic. It is Kinugasa's own contention that his projects do not reflect disillusionment, which would for some mean a preference for the stage illusion over the facts of living. A truer interpretation could be that Kinugasa sees life as a continuum, with the twin desires to escape and at the same time to comprehend both equally strong. Another wonderful scene in *Actress* takes place in the dressing-room just before the first performance of *Resurrection*. Each actor is shown in front of his own mirror in various stages of making up. As they rehearse their dialogue, Kinugasa circles around the room, cutting between them as they feed each other their lines. This visual badinage, one moment an actor as himself, the next another in character, reflected in the mirrors or shot directly, is a perfect metaphor not only for the central theme, but for Kinugasa's career itself: one moment a leader of the *avant-garde* and the next master of the action epic. No one persona tells the entire truth, however, and *Actress*

presents Kinugasa's strongest sentiment that the sweetness of life comes from the very ambivalence which we feel towards it.

Kinugasa again changed companies in 1949, and went to work for Daiei. Each film company in Japan had consistently produced films with their own special flavour (as strong a feature of the studio system in Japan as in the U.S.), and perhaps because it had Kinugasa along with Daisuke Ito among its directors, Daiei continued to produce the best standard fare period films. In 1950, Kinugasa joined Tadashi Imai and Fumio Kamei among others in the critic Akira Iwasaki's communist-influenced Shinsei Motion Picture Company. This short-lived venture was to have their films distributed by the Hokusei Motion Picture Company, which was then importing all Soviet films into Japan. Kinugasa nevertheless continued his association with Daiei, his last film being *The Little Runaway* (*Chisai Tobosha*), a Russian-Japanese co-production of 1967.

The general quality of the thirty-one films Kinugasa has made since *Actress* stands in sharp contrast to his earlier work. Partly because he never really grew out of his infatuation with the romantic hero, even in the wake of the new post-war realism, his later films are marred by an excess of outdated emotion: as for example the 1955 *White Sea of Yushima* (*Yushima No Shiraumi*), which sees its heroine die of a broken heart. One of the only films in which Kinugasa comments on the realities indirectly brought about by the early United States presence in Japan is *The Story of a River Downtown* (*Kawa No Aru Shitamachi No Hanashi*), also made in 1955. The collapse of the post-war economy is peripherally responsible for the heroine becoming a cabaret hostess in a GI ghetto. Although she is saved from the insanity into which she escapes by the compassion of a young doctor, the assertion that love will conquer all is in the end thinly benign.

Although these later films seem to meander knee-deep in tradition and sentiment, Kinugasa still managed in some of them to retain his remarkable flair for atmosphere. In *The Story of a River Downtown* the scene in which the girl goes insane, all alone in a field with the rain pouring down, and a following composition of her sitting in the mud under an old, discarded umbrella, are fresh and haunting. Both *Duel of a Snowy Night* (*Yuki No Yo No Ketto*, 1954) and *Priest and Empress* (*Yoso*, 1963) also have some fine moments of mood and atmosphere; and in terms of pure style, the latter includes the use of billowing diaphanous curtains and gently blown leaves which were Kinugasa's symbols for the ancient Japanese courtly sentiments.

Most Japanese film criticism acknowledges only three of Kinugasa's late films with any more than passing interest: *The Dedication of the Great Buddha* (*Daibutsu Kaigen*, 1952), *White Heron* (*Shirasagi*, 1957) and *Gate of Hell*, all of which are praised for their visual beauty. *The Dedication of the Great Buddha*, which describes the building of the Todaiji temple in Nara and the casting in bronze of its famous Buddha, has been shown in Europe and the Soviet Union over the past few years to an enthusiastic response, and of course *Gate of Hell* is now

a standard classic. The use of colour and composition in *White Heron* is beautiful, and if the story itself (a geisha prefers suicide to the thought of sleeping with a paying customer before her love is consummated with the artist she secretly desires) is by now shop-worn (Shimazu adapted the Izumi Kyoka story in 1941), the viewing is still altogether pleasurable.

Despite its honours abroad, *Gate of Hell* was considered tired by the critics at home. The eye for detail in costuming, sets and make-up was too close to the museum to be wholly acceptable again for the screen. The fact that at the time of the film's release it was considered the most beautiful colour film ever made is little consolation now that there are no more prints in existence which show off the original tone qualities. To non-Japanese, however, the film deserves more attention even now because of Kinugasa's ability to create and sustain the tone and texture of the ancient Japanese sentiments as they are believed to have been.

The purest examples are the final scenes, which actually take up at least the last third of the film. Kinugasa uses the music of the *koto* to indicate the elegance of Machiko Kyo's aristocratic breeding, and combines this fragile sound with the flowing diaphanous curtains of her quarters, through which everyone moves with precise and stylised care. During the ominous moments before her death, we hear a gong whose sound lingers on, gradually diminishing like a fine thin mist. To intensify the effect, Kinugasa occasionally uses the sound of a crow to symbolise imminent death, and uses the appearance of the moon in the style of Japanese tradition. Kyo and her husband walk together in the moonlight, and later as they are together for the last time, he looks at the moon from inside their house. The moon is a symbol of the spirit, and in moments of contemplation or privacy one calls attention to natural beauty.

Certain modern studies of the Court period have been able to isolate distinct attributes of style which were responsible for creating a body of work best known for its ability to do more with less. For example, Court poetry was dominated for centuries by a lyric form of thirty-one syllables and five lines; the *sumi-e* style of painting is organised around large areas of blank space. *Gate of Hell* does not necessarily itself work like these traditional forms, but certain sustained moments of great beauty exhibit a remarkable kinship in their ability to evoke so much more than is stated. The danger lies in the possibility that this seeming transcendence will ultimately lead nowhere; and at its worst, it can illustrate the tendency of so many Japanese films to bog down in mere prettiness.

In the final analysis, Kinugasa's films function best in the comfort of Japanese tradition. More often than not they argue for the benevolence of the family institution, the home, filial piety and personal justice. There is a seeming ambiguity then between the facts of *Crossroads* and *A Page of Madness* and those found in *Actress*. In the first two, the characters work towards reconciling the family, and in the latter, Matsui flaunts nonconformity as art triumphs over happiness. The ambiguity is compounded when we remember that even though the

former films are experiments, their interpretations are explicitly conventional.

As has been suggested, the ambiguity rests on the apparent diversity of Kinugasa's style: impressionistic (occasionally expressionistic) editing in *A Page of Madness*; analytical montage in *Crossroads*; interplay between the theatrical performance and the filmic action in *The Revenge of Yukinojo* and *Actress*; the lyrical imagery of *Gate of Hell*. These examples are not isolated instances in the films in which they occur, but are the primary means by which each film is structured. What makes Kinugasa's eclecticism consistent is his expression of the primacy of emotion, dictating that the *mise en scène* express the particularity of the protagonists' deepest feelings. If we believe, like Kinugasa, that an individual's emotions are almost always too powerful to control, then we can take the life of the moment at hand, the historic present, as the most significant. Thus, Matsui goes against the odds which favour respect for moral convention and succeeds as an artist even though she is denied any satisfaction in the future. Likewise, in *A Page of Madness*, the husband goes against the grain of concealment and fantasy by attempting to reason

with his wife, and in the end he must remain satisfied with merely being physically near since his past has become like a nightmare; to him reconciliation means going insane. Even in *Gate of Hell*, Hasegawa as Morito goes berserk with desire, and as a consequence of her deference to a moral ideal, Machiko Kyo ends her life abruptly in a time of tranquillity. Without the satisfaction of the moment, without the sensibility to extemporise on seeing the moon, life becomes worthless.

Kinugasa thus denies his characters any substantive past on which to base their hopes for a stable future. In this he joins other Japanese film-makers in portraying the world with yet more uncompromising honesty. Kinugasa's films present a picture of life as fragile, based on a certain level of emotional ambiguity which made living eminently precarious. The personal conflicts in his films are to his characters a show of strength between the individual's essential nature and the high moral principles which he in turn has created. It is this self-sufficiency that to Kinugasa made man the source of his own doom and his own greatest joy, and which contributed immeasurably to the consistency of his screen vision. ■

Machiko Kyo in 'Gate of Hell'



ROSI IN CONTEXT

David L. Overbey



Francesco Rosi's first contact with the professional cinema came during the late 1920s when his father, an amateur photographer, entered his son's photograph in a 'Jackie Coogan Look-Alike Contest' sponsored by MGM, and won. Rosi's mother, however, refused to allow anybody in the family to accept the prize—a trip to Hollywood and the possibility of working in films. Rosi was bitten by the movie-bug anyway, during the hours he spent watching American films in the Thirties. ('Life outside the cinemas always displeased me because it was not like that led by Jean Harlow and Franchot Tone; I didn't find out until later that those films didn't reflect American reality.') His father promised him that he could attend the Centro Sperimentale after he had finished his studies. Instead, he worked on the radio, after the war, and in various capacities in the theatre.

His career in the cinema began almost by chance when he was engaged by Visconti in 1948 as an assistant director on *La Terra Trema*. ('Up to that point the only material experience I had had in cinema was once burning a whole reel of Clair's *Le Million* during a projection at a club.') Continuing to work as assistant director and/or co-scenarist with several directors, he gained experience in as many areas of film-making as he could—including dubbing a series of Tarzan films into Italian—until he felt himself ready to direct. Although his first two films, *La Sfida* (1958) and *I Magliari* (1959) won prizes and critical attention, it was only with *Salvatore Giuliano* (1961) that he began to be considered a force in the Italian and international cinema. ('That was the first film in which I felt I had mastered the delicate balance between reality itself and an interpretation of reality.')

Rosi's latest film, *The Context*, is in the direct line of *Salvatore Giuliano*, *The Mattei Affair* and *Lucky Luciano*: an investigation of social reality (represented by public institutions) centred around the deaths of public men. Using the framework of a detective story (based on *The Context* by the Sicilian novelist Leonardo Sciascia), Rosi has constructed an analytical meditation on the basic institutions of society, particularly those which support justice. His hero, Rogas (in Latin 'you ask'), is an honest policeman who believes in the possibility of justice and of discovering the truth—both of which are, to a degree, part of his profession—within, in so far as he is at all political, the system as it exists. His conversations with a journalist friend who is active in the Communist party indicate to us that his political sympathies do not much lie leftward.

As he investigates a series of murders of judges, Rogas comes to suspect that the murderer was one of three victims of 'judicial errors'. Soon, he is doubting that justice can exist within a system where corruption, lies, compromise and political necessity are the rules. His movement through Italy investigating one killing after another thus becomes a metaphor for a metaphysical voyage into uncertainty. Everywhere he is met with suspicion and mistrust. At an elegant bourgeois party, his entrance pro-

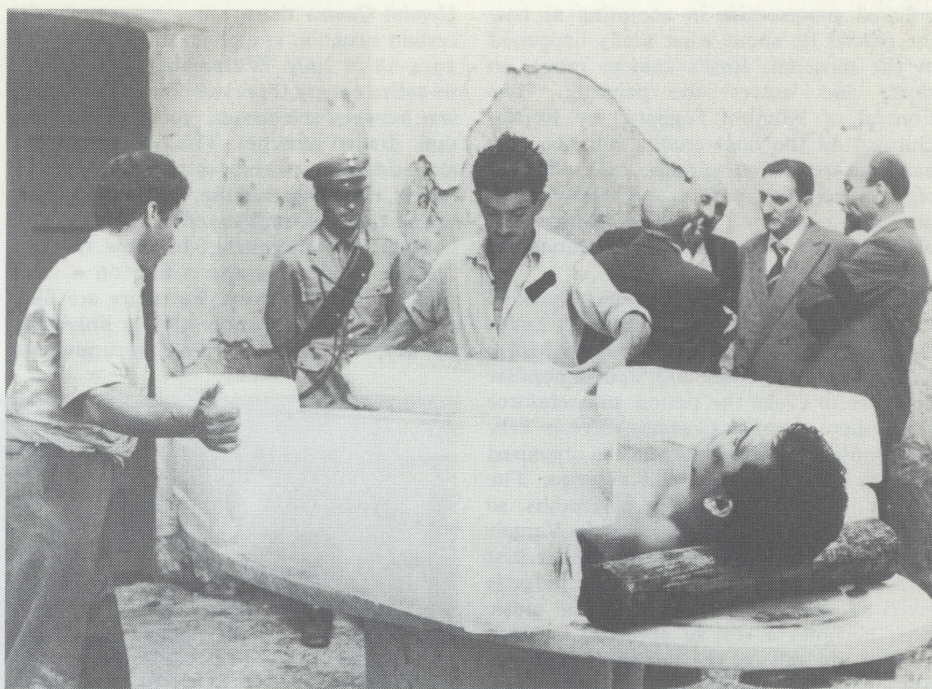
Rosi directing Tina Aumont in 'The Context'

vokes a guest to joke that he has come to arrest him on the basis of conversations overheard on a tapped telephone. Rogas learns that the joke was deadly serious upon entering the offices of the 'political police' to be confronted with hundreds of wiretaps and hidden cameras used in the surveillance of citizens—his own friends among them. Later, he finds his own apartment is bugged, and that he is safe only while asleep in the back seat of a parked car picked at random. His dilemma is made more complex when he realises that all photographs of the now faceless murderer have been mysteriously destroyed, and that as the murderer is bringing the judges 'to justice' he is himself trying to mete out justice to the murderer, a justice which he suspects no longer exists.

Unlike *Salvatore Giuliano* and *The Mattei Affair*, the structure of the film—a structure which Rosi claims originates with the novel—seems chronologically straightforward enough. The impression of a forward movement in time and space is, however, rather deceptive. The gradual unfolding of the context in which the action occurs involves a discovery of past events and an analysis of the past basis for movements of power as they have come to dictate the present and future. The structural problem in *Salvatore Giuliano* rested in the linking of two series of events ten years apart, a problem which dictated the dense complexity of the film's constant shifts in time. In *The Context* the problem was how to give the audience, and Rogas, information necessary for an understanding of what is happening and why without breaking the chronology of the narrative and, in turn, breaking the *policier* tension which Rosi builds so carefully.

Rosi has handled the problem in a variety of ways. There are a number of short visual flashbacks which are accompanied on the soundtrack by narration in the present, and brief flashes of memory fragments which Rogas quickly pieces together. We are also given information through photographs and tape recordings as Rogas examines them in an attempt to link the killings in a reasonable construction. There are several key exchanges of dialogue, particularly that between Rogas and Riches, which impart essential philosophical information, and which are treated as dramatic personal confrontations that to a large degree disguise their informative function. Most interesting, perhaps, is Rosi's use of Italian architecture and artifacts to emphasise visually and emotionally material which is itself rather abstract.

The first sequence of the film, for example, has Judge Varga moving slowly through the catacombs of Naples in silent communication with the mummified ecclesiastics, lawyers and other figures of power of the past. As he emerges into the alive and sunlit Naples street and reaches up to touch a vibrantly green plant, he is shot dead. Much later, Rogas and the Secretary of the Communist party meet to talk about the discovery of a government conspiracy in the Museo Nazionale in Naples, in a huge room filled with Graeco-Roman statues. In that airy space, with its marble reminders of the origins of the ideas of justice, they are shot and killed. At the very end of the film, as the Communist journalist expresses to a Party official his dismay over the Party's



Above: the dead bandit in '*Salvatore Giuliano*'; below: '*Uomini Contro*'



Below: aftermath of the plane crash in '*The Mattei Affair*'



political compromise in accepting as true the official lie about what really happened in the museum, Rosi's camera moves in closer and 'enters' the painting, 'The Funeral of Palmiro Togliatti' by Renato Guttuso. As the final credits roll over the painting, we are left to reflect on the figures represented there, and on the various compromises connected to truth, justice and power in the history of the 'revolutionary' party.

The Context is also the most complex of Rosi's films in its use of music. *Lucky Luciano* utilised the music of Glenn Miller and various Neapolitan and Sicilian popular melodies to evoke the period and reinforce atmosphere. In *The Context*, there is very little music, but the soundtrack is organised around a funeral dirge and a tango. The former is heard first in the catacombs, so faintly as to seem but an echo in Varga's ears. It is the dominant theme of the first section of the film. As judge after judge is given an elaborate state funeral, the music itself becomes a seal of approval on each snuffed life and on the figurative mummification of each public figure. The tango's first appearance, with its connotations of passionate life, offers release and relief—only to be transformed into the murderer's motif, filled with false emotion, a calculated series of movements that will degenerate into a frustrated parody of the very feelings it first evoked—not unlike the very system which Rogas has begun, tragically, to understand all too well.

For *The Context* is a tragedy. In spite of its rigorous analysis of social reality, it remains focused primarily on a single man trying to make sense of his existence. Like all tragic figures, Rogas gains the truth only to lose security, happiness and, finally, his life. All of this is to say, then, that *The Context* looks deceptively simple at first, but is all the more complex for that.

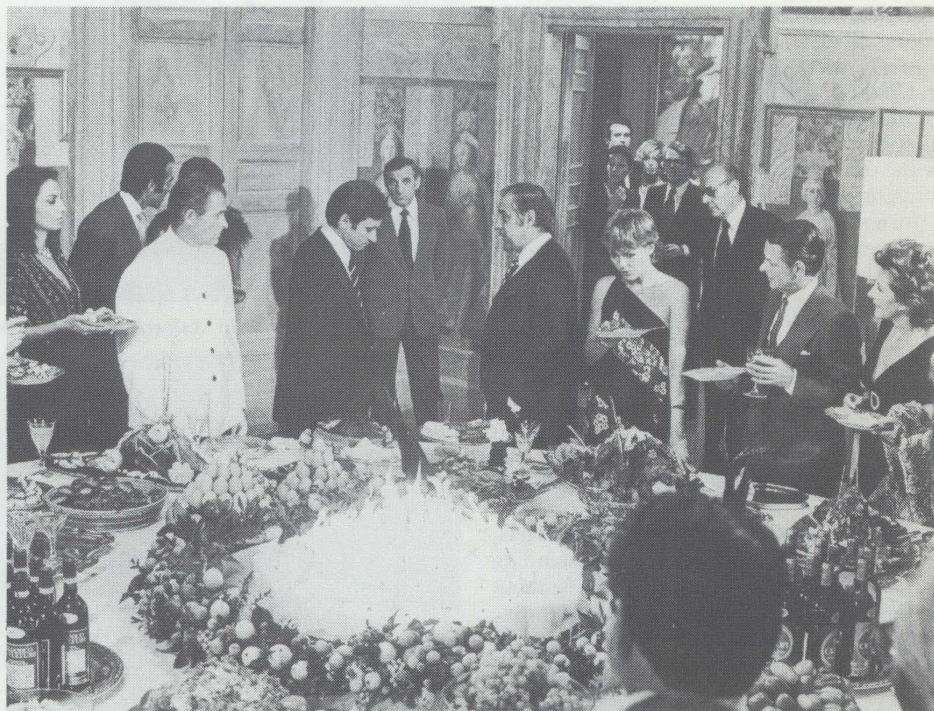
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After a brief beginning of a conversation in Rome, Francesco Rosi agreed to talk with me in Paris, where he was busy directing the dubbing of the French version of *The Context*. ('I hate to dub my own films. I love to shoot with direct sound. But this one is going rather easily since Ventura and many of the other actors are French.') We commiserated with each other over our respective accents (the interview was conducted in French, and I must take the responsibility for any problems in translation). Although a printed transcript cannot indicate it very well, Francesco Rosi laughs a good deal, which is perhaps an indication of his 'will to optimism' in the face of his 'reasonable pessimism'. A tall and elegant man, he no longer resembles Jackie Coogan.

Are you attempting to make a filmed history of Italy? Each of your films, with perhaps a single exception, deals with a different social sector, a different epoch, of Italy's history.

ROSI: It wasn't exactly my intention to construct a history, but it has been my intention, surely, to be a modest witness of my era and my country. That began, to be precise, with *Salvatore Giuliano*, and continued with *Le Mami sulla Città* and *Lucky Luciano*—and certainly this last film *Cadaveri Eccellenti* (*The Context*). But even with

Uomini Contro there was a testament of a certain situation at a given time: the war of 1914–18 in Italy. Within the war against a so-called enemy, there was another battle, the war between the classes, going on in those same Italian trenches. The peasants fought alongside the officers—but officers of the lowest rank—against the bourgeoisie, from which the high-ranking officers came. That is what was interesting; to show that. So *Uomini Contro* was also a film on a small part of Italian history. But there are films of mine which are more closely linked, let us say, in the same line of argument:



'The Context': Lino Ventura and Fernando Rey in the party scene

Salvatore Giuliano, *Mani sulla Città*, *The Mattei Affair*, *Lucky Luciano* and *Cadaveri Eccellenti*.

And do you intend to make a film about the Fascist era, say about Mussolini?

I have thought about it, but I want to avoid making an historical film on Fascism. I'm more interested in the way Mussolini came to power, because that mechanism still operates.

Buñuel said that a good director always makes the same film. Do you?

Yes. My theme is the same, power and institutions. I have the impression of always making the same film—even though, because I have a horror of repeating myself, I make an effort each time to take a different route. I change the subject, but the spirit and mind are always the same.

There always seems to be a certain ambiguity in your films. For example, in the new film there's an ambiguity in the character of Rogas. He disapproves of the methods of the political police—wire-taps and spying devices—but uses them himself when he listens to a taped conversation with the Chief of Police.

No. It is life which is ambiguous, and there are not many things in life one can depend upon with certainty. Above all, when one is faced by actions of any collective sort, particularly those which are in some way linked to or regulated by power.

In the case of an assassination in a political climate, it is extremely difficult to uncover the truth. And anyway, what is the truth? I choose to make just those films in which it will be possible to pose certain questions about the nature of truth. As for Rogas: he does not employ the same methods as the others. It is not he who taps phones, even if he does at one time listen to something already recorded. Therefore he is not corrupt. As a policeman, he might well come to do that, but that is not the question posed by the film. Rather, it is that Rogas discovers that the certainty, the credibility,

of the institutions and of justice itself does not exist. When a powerful man who believes blindly in justice begins to understand that he must doubt, the ground starts to slide from under his feet.

The central exchange in the film, then, is that between Riches, the President of the Court, and Rogas on the subject of Voltaire and the philosophical beginnings of scepticism in justice and religion.

Yes. That is, let us say, the ideology of a reactionary like Riches, who has decided to maintain power and to act within that power. He declares that at any given moment, when Justice has decided that a man is guilty, at that moment he himself has no doubts. When a religion begins to allow for questions, it is finished. And when men begin to ask philosophical questions about justice and power when confronted with lawlessness and rebellion, a man like Riches can see only one thing to do: decimate. Choose one man in every ten and kill him. That is, let us say, the answer of the reactionary side in the film.

This is the first film in which you have moved so close to a man; in the others you always kept a certain distance. Indeed, you begin the film with an extreme close-up after that first long shot, and you stay in close-up almost until the first murder.

That's true, although I began to move a little way towards such a position in *Lucky Luciano*. In the second part of that film I

came very close to Luciano. In this film I was interested in getting very close to Rogas, as well as to the others. At the same time, I wanted to look at the context, the social-political links. And I tried to find an equilibrium between the two—exterior and interior, extreme closeness and distance.

As always, you hint at the personal life of a character—as with Lucky Luciano's mistress or, in your new film, with the telephone call from Rogas' wife—but you refuse to enter into the characters' personal lives. Why?

Because in the general economy of the

I feel as if I'm balanced on a see-saw. On the one hand I am a reasonable being; through reason, a pessimist. On the other hand, I am a man who participates, who participates with a will even. Therefore, I have the will to hope, and I even have hope. You remember, Gramsci said: 'The pessimism of reason and the optimism of the will.' That is me. It's true that I have a rapport with the films of neo-realism. After all, everything started for me with Visconti and *La Terra Trema*. That was the first time I really did anything in the cinema, and it was a very fundamental experience



'The Context': the shooting in the Museo Nazionale in Naples

stories, personal lives have no real importance to the illumination of character. For example, Nottola, the building speculator in *Mani sulla Città*, is never shown with his wife, although I know he has a wife and even a son. I am sure that the audience understands what kind of wife he has and what sort of life he has with her without my showing them. I just don't think it's necessary.

In the new film, the décor of Rogas' apartment tells us a good deal about his life—the framed pictures leaning, unhung, against the wall, for example.

I believe in the power of the visual. The cinema is images. Therefore, I have to be capable of using the décor, or the way a man is dressed, the way he walks, the way he makes a gesture. I have the pretension to think that I'm able to make the audience understand with images what sort of man they are seeing. If I needed to take up a man's personal life, his intimate relationships, of course I would choose another method. In the stories that I have filmed, the social, collective actions and functions of the characters are much more important than their private lives. But I hope that I use the materials in relation to the character in such a way that one always understands exactly what sort of man he is.

One finds the same moral viewpoint in your films as in the films of the neo-realist movement: a desire to criticise reality in the hope of changing society.

for me, that contact with reality: the reality of a small village in Sicily, with real fishermen who became our actors. Visconti followed a rigid structure; he had a very precise idea of what he wanted, and it was not in any way a documentary. I don't make documentaries either. I make documented films on a certain reality of life, and in this I do feel linked to the neo-realist experience. On the other hand, I make an effort—since *Salvatore Giuliano*—to interpret the facts and documents. I don't try to represent life more or less exactly, but to interpret what I know of it.

You have said that Visconti worked within a very precise framework. Does that also apply to you, or are you more given to improvisation?

Watch out! Visconti did have an exact idea of what he wanted to do, but he got what he wanted partly through improvisation. In *La Terra Trema*, he worked with the fishermen and they invented the dialogue together, though he had a definite idea of what would be said. He was stimulated by the people and the places, but he always had that structure. Me too. I work from a firm shooting script, but I allow myself a wide margin for improvisation. It's much easier to improvise, to profit from the stimulus of things that happen and are part of the reality of the moment, if you already have a clear idea of what you intend to do.

Is that stimulation one reason you prefer to shoot in actual locations?

I almost never shoot inside a studio; only occasionally for a few scenes where it seems natural to do so. For example, the scene in *Mani sulla Città* in the Council Chamber of Naples. I couldn't use the real one, and so that was shot in an exact studio reproduction of the real room, and I brought all the city councillors into that reproduction in order to have the climate of the real chamber. For *Salvatore Giuliano*, I chose to shoot in the village of Montelepre where most of the history of Giuliano actually happened. That was a risk, because I was obliged to work under the eyes of the very people who lived that story. I had witnesses, very interested ones, who became my judges. That might have been an awful limitation on, let us say, my artistic freedom. But I took that risk; I even provoked it, because I was sure that those people could help me. The story of Salvatore Giuliano was one that really happened to a bandit, to a man who really existed. His whole story is well known. But I wanted to know what those people knew, what had really happened, and what was hidden behind what they knew. Therefore I wanted to reproduce all the emotions that the people had at the time.

In *Lucky Luciano* and *The Mattei Affair* both men are seen throughout the films. But one never sees Salvatore Giuliano, except as a corpse. Why?

Because the film is not about a man. It's about the pain of a Sicilian village, about people badly treated, used, exploited by different political powers. It is a film, indeed, about a whole framework of politics which is central to all of Italy. Therefore, I couldn't make a film just about a man. I profited by the character, Salvatore Giuliano, to make a sort of discourse about institutions, about the different forces of the police, but above all about justice and the negation of justice. And, of course, about various versions, various interpretations of 'the truth'. *Lucky Luciano* was also a film about a historical period with political implications, but what I was interested in showing was the end of a myth—the end of a boss, who had lost his power, who had been left on his throne and who pretended he was still a king but who was no longer a king. The police, the Narcotics Bureau, the F.B.I., all had a strong self-interest in maintaining the illusion that he was still a king; the Mafia in the United States also had an interest in maintaining the illusion; and he knew that and accepted it all. It was the sunset of a king. I wanted the public to understand all that.

In fact, in the film there is no great difference between the two worlds, that of Luciano and the Mafia and the government and its agents. One feels the human being in Luciano, for all his evil, and therefore has some sympathy for him, while the agent Siragusa was almost totally one-dimensional and unsympathetic. Was that part of your intention?

I was interested in saying, based on certain documentation, that immediately after the Second World War, the Mafia was put back into power by the American military and political power. Because when the Americans liberated and occupied Sicily, the first mayor of the first liberated town in Sicily was a *capo* of the Mafia.

Was that, do you think, because the Mafia was anti-Communist?

Perhaps that is how it was seen, but the Mafia is neither Communist nor anti-Communist. The Mafia is always with whatever power is there. I suppose that with Communism there would no longer be a place for the Mafia, I hope, but . . . As for your sympathy for Luciano and your antipathy towards Siragusa: those are the two faces of Sicily, the two faces of power which exercise themselves in two different ways, because Luciano is a criminal and Siragusa is an anti-criminal, a policeman. In his profession as a policeman, he has a certain cruelty, and he stores up even more cruelty in his hunt after this individual. Perhaps, since he is a Sicilian like the other, he is full of hate not just for this other Sicilian, but for the other side of himself. Each of us is at the same time himself and the enemy . . .

There is also in most of the films a sort of criticism of the Church . . .

The Church as a power, of course, not as religion. Everyone is free to choose whatever religion he likes. That doesn't interest me. But the Church as a repressive power—that is another story for countries like Italy or Spain.

You would then side with Vittorini against Togliatti in their famous discussion of culture in *Il Politecnico* concerning the possession of the truth, cultural, religious, or political?

Yes, totally. It is necessary to flee those institutions which claim they have the truth. I have no certainties: I have doubts. I don't trust those men who claim to have absolute certainty. I think all power must submit itself to and regulate itself with culture, that is, with truth and, therefore, with liberty. I think that it is the duty of every intellectual, or of every man who has the privilege of being aware of culture in its widest sense, to defend liberty, above all of those who have not had such privileges.

In *Uomini Contro* and *Lucky Luciano*, there are sequences of violence, stylised to the point where one might call them visual ballets of death. Was that a way to place the romanticised violence of the usual films in the war and gangster genres within a kind of frame, thus making room for the analysis which is to follow?

Yes, that was the idea, particularly in *Lucky Luciano*. I wanted to liberate myself in the fastest way possible from the sort of violence that an audience waits for. Violence is an instrument of work for the Mafia and I could hardly ignore that. But I wanted to show it all at once in order to say to an audience: 'Listen, we are talking about men who kill. Look, then, at the way they kill, and afterwards we will analyse the reasons why they kill, and what lies beyond and behind the killing. What are the relations between the men who play the roles of those who kill and those who do not kill in a literal sense but are often even more guilty than those who do the actual killing?' I wanted to show that there are supposedly respectable men who have great responsibilities in industry and in the institutions of the state, and who are yet—perhaps not the real bosses—the brains of all that. One should not think, however, of a giant machination, or of the Mafia as a group of men sitting round a table making decisions. It

is instead a configuration of interests. There are various routes which lead to the same goal, which have the same objectives. My purpose in *Lucky Luciano* was to show all that.

Why is it that women play such a limited role in your films?

Do you find it so? You are forgetting that in my first two films Rosanna Schiaffino and Belinda Lee had quite important parts, and that I made a film with Sophia Loren.

***C'era una Volta*; that's very charming, but it's a film I always forget to connect with you immediately. Perhaps because I find it odd that you should have made it, in the context of your other work.**

Well, it's not as bizarre as all that! Actually I rather like that film. I wanted to make a fairy story, but one which had a rather realistic coloration. Do you know Basile, the great Sicilian writer of fairy stories who wrote *Lo Cunto dei Cunti*? Those have a Neapolitan flavour. You know there is a very strong stream of realism in Neapolitans, so that the fairy stories too are rather realistic: the dream is to be able to eat a lot and to wear clothes like a princess. In *C'era una Volta* I tried for something of that realism, so that there is the hero's relationship with his mother (he is a bit weak in that area like many men), and there is a focus on pasta and cooking.

But to return to women: if they are not so central to most of my films that is hardly my fault. I make films about power and institutions of power, and women are rarely there. If there had been many women who were building speculators, for example, I would have had one in *Mani sulla Città*. When women become more central to such things, as I hope they will, they will be in my films.

Since *Salvatore Giuliano* you've worked with the same director of photography, Pasqualino De Santis. What is his contribution to the films? I ask primarily because of your distinctive lighting.

Before *Salvatore Giuliano* (on which De Santis was cameraman) I worked with Di Venanzo, but he died. I like working with the same collaborators, because one can proceed with trust and confidence. The photography is obviously the most important part of a film, since film is images. It's all a question of sensibility, of attachment, if you like, to the personality of the director. There are cinematographers who can't change their style as they work with different directors, and I find that a great weakness, for it is the cinematographer who must follow the director, must follow a line of sensibility which may not be his own. De Santis understands what I want and is able to give me very difficult things, particularly as I very often work with natural light sources, since that allows me to work quickly as I like to do. De Santis gives me quite beautiful and functional images in very difficult shooting circumstances.

How do you cast your films? You shoot films in Italy for the most part, no matter what the international implications of the subjects, yet playing Italians you have had the American Rod Steiger, the Swedish Max von Sydow, the Frenchman Lino Ventura, as well as Italian professionals like Gian Maria Volonté, all mixed with non-professionals.

I saw Rod Steiger in *On The Waterfront* and *The Big Knife*, two very good films, and he had the sort of power I wanted in *Mani sulla Città*. It is odd, because there Steiger, who is a very professional actor, worked face to face in direct sound with Guido Alberti, a non-professional, yet their performances blended together very well. That was the first time Steiger worked away from America, and he agreed to take the part without seeing a script, with only my explanation of what I had in mind, which is very unusual. *The Mattei Affair* and *Lucky Luciano* would not have been possible without Volonté, who is Italy's finest actor. The Americans suggested that I make *Lucky Luciano* with an American star, but that film could not have been made the way it was without Volonté, who is perfect and achieves what is almost impossible in that role—remember he hardly ever speaks in the film. I told them that it was time America heard of Volonté.

On the other hand, Volonté would not have been right as Rogas in *The Context*. For that I needed an actor with a certain face and a certain manner, so that the audience could see at once that this was an uncomplicated man, an unsuspicious man, an honest man; and of course Ventura is exactly right for that.

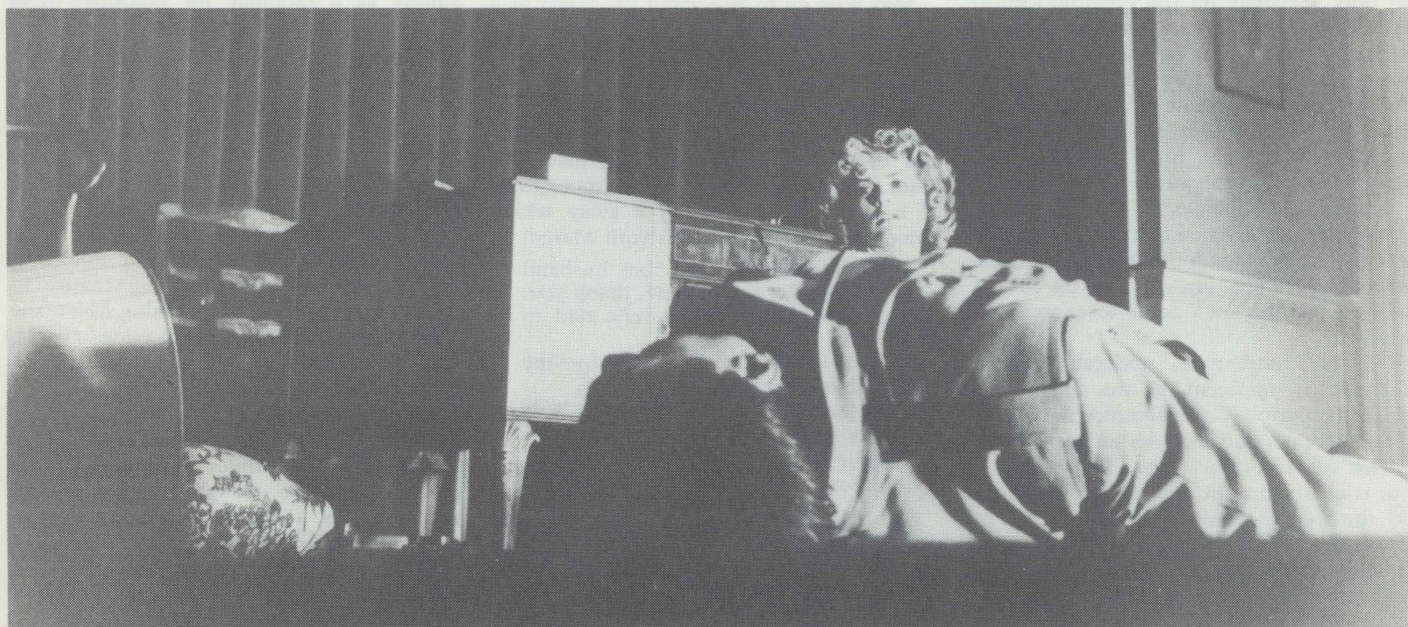
In English you have kept the original title of the book *The Context*, which seems a perfect title for the film. But in Italian and French you call it *Cadaveri Eccellenti*. Why?

In Italian I was afraid that the original title would be mistaken for 'to contest', which has little to do with the film. In English the original title works, and also the Italian title doesn't translate well ('Corpses of Quality'). And then, when I changed things in the book—always in agreement with Sciascia—I decided that the title should change as well since they were now two different things. In the book, the action is set in a fictitious country, but as film is more realistic and as I was shooting in Italy, I could hardly disguise the fact, so the setting became Italy. Then, in the book the investigator actually shoots the Secretary of the Communist party. I changed that because up to the end Rogas is a positive character, and even if one sees the Secretary as a negative one, I didn't think we could have Rogas kill. Now, of course, they are both killed, and the official version is that Rogas has killed the Secretary and himself, another manipulation of the truth by the controlling power. I think it's more interesting, and less of a political or ideological tract, although I admire the book enormously.

And your next project?

There are many things in the back of my mind, but they are far in the back. I am still caught up in this film, and in the things that this film is about which now are happening everywhere in the world. Not just in Italy, although things there are perhaps more interesting than anywhere else at the moment, but in Chile, in America, in France and Spain. I want somehow to participate in all that, which is one reason I made the film. I am, of course, a film director, not a politician, but I have the pretension that the cinema makes an audience reflect on things. That is why I make films. ■

DIAL M FOR MURDER



'Dial M for Murder': Anthony Dawson, Grace Kelly

A play by Frederick Knott/A film by Alfred Hitchcock

Peter Bordonaro

In the early 1950s, within two years, New Yorkers had the opportunity to see *Dial M for Murder* on the stage and on the screen. In making his film, Alfred Hitchcock seemingly took the plot, characters and setting of Frederick Knott's play, used his cinematic skills to make the talky piece lively enough to be acceptable as a movie, directed his actors, including the beautiful new star Grace Kelly, into exciting performances, and was done with it. Contemporary reviews rested on the premise that Hitchcock had managed to make the play into a dialogue movie that was interesting to watch. Recent studies of Hitchcock's work seem to leave it in the category of an 'interesting filmed play'. Robin Wood makes only one reference to it. Hitchcock himself, in the Truffaut interview book, says he merely emphasised the theatrical aspects and tried to avoid the temptation to 'open up' the play.

On the surface, then, the two works remain essentially the same, and *Dial M for Murder* can be analysed in terms of Hitchcock's editing pattern, his use of colour, and the general adaptation of his cinematic techniques to Frederick Knott's work. A careful examination of both play and film, however, reveals that the director made numerous changes. These alterations are subtle, but they are major because through them Hitchcock turned the material into his own work, retaining the basic plot and most of the dialogue but switching the focus of the play so that the film expresses his own thematic concerns. Although *Dial M for Murder* was shot in 3-D, it was apparently shown commercially only in its flat version. The use of colour and the editing pattern, particularly in the first third, are two of the film's obvious achievements. Close analysis of the editing tends only to shed more light on Hitchcock's masterfully cinematic adaptation of a play. Unfortunately, in studying the film I have only had access to a black and white print, and I saw the colour version too long ago to be able to discuss the creative

use of colour. The main purpose here, then, is to examine how and where Hitchcock changed the play, and the manner in which these changes reflect his thematic concerns.

A screenplay by Frederick Knott, labelled 'Final Script' and dated July 30, 1953, is in the Theatre Collection of New York's Lincoln Center Library. A study of it yields little, since it too is quite different from the film. In spite of the label, it is apparently only a draft.

There are many categories of changes in the screen version. First and most obvious are those which make the material more cinematic without falsely 'opening it up': the editing, the famous high angle shots and the recurring visual motif of the telephone are examples. Second, there are the changes which create Hitchcockian suspense out of rather straightforward stage thriller material, as particularly evidenced in the murder sequence. Most significant are the changes at a thematic level, which involve subtle shifts in Knott's characters and in the

arrangement of dialogue in order to express Hitchcock's concern with the nature of human relationships and with sexuality in general. Hitchcock also adds touches of his familiar ironic humour, both for the chuckles they will elicit and for their expression of his overall ironic view of the situation. Naturally, there are also 'nuts and bolts' changes,

Plot Summary

Tony Wendice, a former tennis star, and his heiress wife Margot live in a small flat in London. One evening, while awaiting Tony's arrival, Margot explains to her former lover, Mark Halliday, an American mystery writer on a return visit to London, that their affair of a year ago has led to her being blackmailed. Margot has not informed her husband of the matter. Tony, however, had secretly become aware of the affair and engineered the blackmail as the first step in a scheme to murder his unfaithful wife. He forces Lesgate/Swann, an old college friend and petty criminal, into agreeing to murder Margot.

Using a 'stag party' as an alibi, Tony arranges Lesgate's entry into the flat by means of a key hidden outside the door under the stair carpet. Tony telephones the flat to rouse Margot from bed so that Lesgate can surprise her in the living room. The plan falls apart when Margot stabs her attacker.

Tony assures Margot's arrest and conviction by planting evidence which makes it appear that she deliberately murdered Lesgate to avoid further blackmail. Mark never believes in Margot's guilt and tries to solve the case, but it is the smart Inspector Hubbard who finally traps Tony by means of the still hidden key.

dialogue which seemingly has been dropped merely to keep the film moving. Lastly, there are those changes which are difficult to explain concretely, such as the name change in the Robert Cummings character: Max Halliday becomes Mark Halliday. One can only speculate on the possible significance of the word 'mark', in the sense of object, or target. On the surface, he is an innocuous or even helpful character, but in actuality he has been singled out as the mark or target of derision. At any rate, because Hitchcock's form, method and themes are so interwoven, the idea of separating the changes into absolute or exclusive categories becomes not only difficult, but perhaps futile. Hitchcock turns someone else's play into his film by editing his shots into his own genre to express his own ideas.

The first and most noticeable visual alteration is apparent in the main set's design. In the play, the Wendice flat seems more elaborate, and includes an entry foyer at back centre of the stage. The bedroom door is on stage right, next to the fireplace, and the french windows are at stage left. The sofa, upon which most two-way conversations take place, naturally faces the audience. The main action is therefore



The Wendices at breakfast in the opening sequence; 'pleasant conversation' before the two men leave for the party

played out against the background of the entry foyer, and the bedroom door adds little but a convenient exit when characters must be removed from the stage. In the film the set is more confined: not only is the foyer eliminated, so that the front door opens directly into the living room, but the position of the bedroom door gives it more prominence. If we assume for a moment that the action is all shot from the position of the french windows, then we can conclude that Hitchcock merely eliminated the entry hall and turned the set ninety degrees. Obviously, the film is shot only partially from this viewpoint. Many different camera set ups were used to give various views of the room, but the least frequent is that which the play used consistently. Since Hitchcock was composing a 3-D film, he would want a set which would emphasise depth. The sofa faces both the fireplace and the bedroom door, and thus allows shots taken from behind the sofa to use this door as a framing device. This is one method used to achieve depth.

On the stage, all the scenes naturally take place in the living room. The play opens with a dialogue between Margot and Max:

'As the curtain rises, Margot is handing Max a drink. She suddenly hears something outside and opens and peeps through the hall door for

a moment. Then she closes the door and turns to Max.

MARGOT: For a moment I thought it was Tony. I'm sorry I interrupted you. What were we talking about . . . ?

(Random House edition, 1953, p. 4)

Max goes on to talk about his career as a writer of murder mysteries. We learn that the two have had an affair, but that Tony, Margot's husband, has changed and thus the marriage has improved. Margot goes on to explain about her lost handbag and letter, and eventually shows Max the blackmail notes. Just before Tony enters, Max speaks of a story he is writing, a story which obviously involves his affair with Margot:

MARGOT: Only to find that husband and wife were very happy, thank you.

MAX: And that he was very glad to know it.

MARGOT: Max, let's drink to—the way things turn out.

MAX (raising glass to Margot): Way things turn . . .

As they are about to drink, Tony enters the room.

Although the movie's opening (up to the point of Tony's entrance) contains basically the same information, Hitchcock's film is very different. The first shot is of a young



London policeman (Martin Milner), in medium close-up, standing on a street; he looks around and walks on. The film ends with a shot of the same policeman, photographed from behind, standing by a street lamp. His innocent face tells us that he really does not know what is going on, and the last shot suggests that he has learned nothing. The director does not make much of this; it's just a throwaway joke, but at the same time it is an ironic comment on the vigilance of the police, who supposedly keep order while actually missing the crimes that go on in front of them.

The street dissolves to Tony (Ray Milland) and Margot (Grace Kelly) kissing while standing over a breakfast table in the kitchen. They sit down at the table. Margot glances at the newspaper and then looks up, suspiciously, at her husband. An insert informs us that on the *Queen Elizabeth*, arriving that day, is an American passenger, Mark Halliday (Robert Cummings). We see some very brief shots of Mark's disembarkation, and then a dissolve to Margot and Mark, kissing in the living room. Here Hitchcock has told us in just a minute or two, and in strictly visual terms, a good deal about Margot's marital state and her affair with Mark. Further, this opening and the initial dialogue represent a major alteration in the thrust of the drama.

Margot's first words (and the first in the film) inform Mark that she has not told Tony anything about them. During the first encounter between Max and Margot in the play, we learn the beginnings of the mystery. The love affair seems to exist simply as a rationale for blackmail (and to leave open the possibility of a happy ending). Knott's dialogue points out that the affair is over, that Margot's marriage is now happy (at least in her mind), and that Max, stalwart fellow that he is, accepts matters as they are. On the other hand, by the close proximity of the kissing scenes, the film emphasises Margot's infidelity. Her suspicious glance across the breakfast table shows us that she is not innocent; because she looks at the announcement in the paper and is next seen kissing Mark, she seems to have arranged the meeting. (In the play, it is Max who calls her; dialogue dropped by Hitchcock.)

In the play, Margot is trying to put her past behind her, and the murder plot thus makes her a totally innocent victim. Not so in the film. The change is significant on various levels. First of all, because Margot remains continually guilty, we are able both to sympathise with her and to understand Tony's desire to kill her. The sympathy is not complete, of course, and his motivation, as we shall see, is quite complex. Margot's continued, or desired, infidelity informs us of her ambivalence about the two men. She is still sexually interested in Mark, so her claims that the affair is over do not sound quite true. At the same time, however, she does seem to be in love with Tony and is still sexually attracted to him.

Hitchcock establishes from the outset the sexual nature of the film, and develops it in this scene. Mark, like Max, seems to accept the situation (Margot is putting him off), but the film emphasises his sexual frustration. As the conversation becomes more intimate, Hitchcock frames the couple behind a row of liquor bottles. The 3-D composition of this shot (evident throughout, even in a flat version) places the bottles in the extreme foreground, emphasising their phallic quality. In this shot Mark is trying to express his feelings for Margot, and it ends on another kiss. It is on this kiss, rather than on a toast to the way things turn out, that Tony arrives home. By Tony's entry at this point, Hitchcock indicates Margot's infidelity, Mark's sexual quest and the beginnings of Tony's sexually rooted motivation. Since his wife is kissing another man practically under his nose, Tony also gains some immediate sympathy.

One of Hitchcock's most subtle achievements is the reshaping of the character of Tony. Once again, the man of play and film appear on the surface to be the same. Close examination, as usual, reveals differences. Changes in Margot and in the Margot-Mark relationship alter the audience's perception of Tony; and throughout the film added and deleted dialogue, editing and specific shot compositions significantly transform the character. From his first appearance in the play, he seems cruder, much more the tennis jock he is supposed to be. All dialogue which serves only to point up the differences in culture and education between Tony and Mark is

missing from the film. Similarly, conversations which oppose Margot's Innocent to Tony's Villain are dropped. From the beginning, this Tony is more sophisticated and self-confident than Mark. He is urbane, consistently charming and never very interested in athletics.

Knott further stacks the deck against Tony by making him a petty liar. (For example, when Margot phones during his interview with Lesgate/Swann, Tony lies that he is sleepy and has just made some coffee.) The film omits all such statements. Obviously, Tony is involved in the far more evil act of planning Margot's murder, and the audience really does not need any more reason to dislike him. As handled by Hitchcock, the planning of the murder (for which Knott does deserve credit) becomes the plotting of the perfect crime, a work of art. While it is intrinsically despicable, there is also something admirable in the fine precision with which he has worked out the details; and Hitchcock certainly did not want to cloud this grand deception by the inclusion of petty lies.

At the same time, other seemingly innocuous remarks are retained. For example, again during the telephone conversation, Tony misreads 'Albert Hall' in Margot's engagement book: 'Looks like Al Bentall, who's he? Another of your boy-friends?' Hitchcock keeps this sly question because, among other things, it helps shed light on Tony's motivation. That motivation is complex and one of the film's central elements. In the play, Tony's primary motive seems to be money; it is only secondarily, if at all, sexual jealousy. In the film, it is just the opposite. Tony in the play explains to Lesgate a great deal more about Margot's family money and his own search for a rich wife; the implication is that he never had any interest in Margot beyond her wealth. He also tells Lesgate in both versions that when he was confronted with Margot's affair, he was frightened because it would mean the loss of income. Hitchcock does not remove money as a motivating factor, but he reduces it. The film has already revealed Tony as a man wronged by his wife (the kissing scenes), and against this background Tony's explanations to Lesgate become only partially true. His motivation is no more clear-cut to him than it is to us; money may be one of the stock motives for murder, but it does not fully explain Tony's obsession. The casting, as with all the characters, is crucial here. Grace Kelly is an extremely beautiful woman, and her presence alone makes it difficult to accept that Tony would only be drawn to her inherited wealth.

In this light, Tony's false limp and the cane offer visual evidence for the sexual motivation. In the play, as in the film, Tony's 'twisted knee' serves as an excuse to induce Lesgate to come to the Wendice flat. On the stage, however, Tony only 'turns and deliberately assumes a painful limp' (page 29). He does not use a cane. Lesgate only makes one reference to the 'groggy knee', and after all pretences have been eliminated, the stage directions indicate that Tony 'has dropped his limp' (page 44). Lesgate apparently never notices. Since the cane has no necessary function, and since it is a Hitchcock addition, its phallic quality seems unavoidable, especially as it is



The murder sequence. Tony (Ray Milland) at the party; Lesgate (Anthony Dawson) waiting for his telephone call

brought to our attention just as Tony begins to explain to Lesgate that he wants him to murder his wife. When Tony gets up to wipe the fingerprints from the photograph, there is a close-up of the cane, lying down, from Lesgate's point of view. Unlike Knott, Hitchcock has not simply let the matter drop, but rather he has informed us in a very economical and visual manner that Lesgate has noticed it. In doing so, the director also seems to have suggested the deeper implications of the image.

In the next scene of both versions, Tony, Margot and Mark are together before the men go off to the stag party. It is here that

the major point of the play is made through Max/Mark's comments on the perfect crime. Knott ironically has Max say that if he were planning the perfect crime it would not work because of 'some stupid mistake' which he would not realise until 'I found that everyone was looking at me.' The plot of *Dial M for Murder*, of course, turns precisely on such a mistake and, at the end of the play, Tony realises his mistake as everybody, the characters and the audience, is looking at him. Hitchcock does not tamper with this basic aspect of the plot.

Directly after this pleasant conversation, however, Knott makes it relatively simple for Tony to take the crucial key from Margot's handbag. First, when he realises that his ploy about his own missing key will not work, he drops it out of his glove on to the desk. Then Knott sends Margot and Max off stage, giving Tony the opportunity to remove Margot's key from her handbag and place it under the stair carpet outside the front door. Hitchcock alters this scene in order to make it more cinematic, to build suspense and to force audience identification with Tony, as he compels Tony to play a game with Margot and her handbag in order to get the key. On the pretext of borrowing money from Margot, he takes her bag, and when she protests he puts it behind his back. In close-up we tensely watch him remove the key from the change purse, as Margot attempts to take the bag from him.

This scene is one of the most expressive in the film. It suggests most of the film's central ideas, and its value does not arise merely from the obvious plot importance of the key. The scene is significant because in filming it this way Hitchcock forces the audience to identify with Tony's attempt to take the key, and thus moves a major step in implicating the spectator in the murder plan. Further, and perhaps most importantly, it is crucial because in this scene the couple seem genuinely happy. Margot is protesting, playfully but seriously (her refusal to allow Tony access to her handbag reminds us that it contained the original incriminating letter; her protest suggests more incriminating contents, but we are not informed why she objects). Tony plays back, unquestionably serious about removing the key but enjoying the play with Margot. The game has a sexual quality to it which underscores Margot's ambivalent feelings about Tony and his about her. Mark is properly excluded from this scene, and here he seems most like the interloper he is. The scene belongs completely to Hitchcock and is overwhelming because it points out the ambivalent quality of both characters' motivations, while mixing the emotions of the audience. We want Tony to remove the key while we simultaneously want Tony and Margot to send Mark off to the party alone so that they can promptly go to bed together. It does not seem incidental here that the struggle involves a handbag and a key, with all the sexual implications such objects convey, even though they are essential elements in Knott's plot.

Once Tony has secured the key, Hitchcock concentrates on involving the audience with Tony's difficulty in hiding it under the

stair carpet. Mark, framed in the doorway, stands in front of the designated stair, and thus he typically interferes with plans. By means of a cut, we follow Mark and Tony out into the hallway. Hitchcock turns Tony's statement about his boss calling (from the play) into a stalling device for Tony. In doing this, the director milks Knott's dialogue far beyond its original intention and gains its full value. The stall affords Tony the opportunity to place the key under the carpet, and after Tony and Mark have exited, the camera dollies back to the stair and to a huge close-up of the tip of the key, slightly visible under the carpet.

On the stage, the murder scene is handled visually, without dialogue, but in a straightforward manner that seems to have no meaning beyond its necessity to the narrative. Act Two, Scene II opens to the darkened living room, lit only by the fire. Lesgate enters, takes off his scarf and ties two knots in it as he crosses to the french windows. The phone rings. He steps behind the curtains. The light goes on under the bedroom door. Margot enters the room, answers the phone and is attacked. A struggle ensues, and she finally stabs Lesgate with her scissors. When it is over, as in the film, she begins to speak into the telephone.

Although these basic elements remain visually exciting in the film, Hitchcock makes the murder scene longer, designs it for suspense and concentrates a great deal of attention on Tony. By his use of the element of time and images of wrist watches, the director again implicates the audience in the attempted murder. The sequence begins with a shot of Lesgate walking down the dark, rainy street to the Wendice flat. We watch him enter the hall and remove the key. Cut to a brief shot of Margot asleep in bed. Cut back to Lesgate entering the darkened living room. Up to this point, although more suspenseful and cinematic, the scene is the same as it is in the play, but here the changes begin. Lesgate looks at his watch, and a close-up tells us that it is two minutes to eleven. (Tony had arranged to call precisely at 11.00 p.m.) Lesgate goes behind the curtain.

Now a surprising cut to Tony, Mark and others sitting at a table at the stag party. Tony looks at his watch; it is 10.40. Cut back to Lesgate. Cut back to the party; Tony again looks at his watch, but it reads the same time. He asks the correct time; someone tells him that it's twenty past. Mark, significantly, corrects him and informs Tony that it's just after eleven. Tony then hurriedly explains to the surprised Mark that he must call his boss. Cut back to Lesgate, walking across the room towards the door. Cut to Tony, walking towards a phone box which is occupied. He is forced to wait; and the audience, like Tony, feels the wait lasts an interminable time. Finally, he enters the phone box. There is a close-up of the 'M' on the dial, followed by a brief shot of the telephone switching mechanism operating (perhaps the film's only gratuitous shot). At this point we cut back to Lesgate, who is almost out of the door. The sound of the telephone causes him to rush to the windows. With the addition of a shot of Margot rising from bed, the scene is then

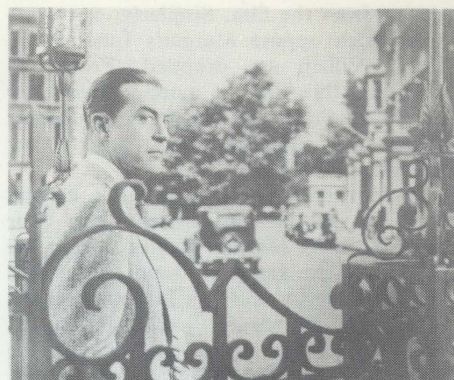
played out essentially as it is on stage. The major difference is that during the struggle and killing there are a number of cuts back to Tony on the phone, reacting to what he hears. It has been necessary to describe this sequence in detail because it is here that the elements of the play are most obviously moulded into a Hitchcock film.

The shots of Tony, the emphasis on the disparity in the time, and Lesgate's near departure all force the viewer to desire the successful execution of the murder. The succeeding shots of Margot getting up, the light under the bedroom door and her walk across the room are terrifying, but it is too late. We are allied with Tony, and the guilt is ours. Does Tony feel any guilt? His reaction is, as usual, complex. As soon as he realises that Margot is on the phone he switches back into his role playing, reacting with surprise and bafflement. The close-ups of his face as he listens to the sounds of the struggle reveal his confused emotions and complex motivations. His realisation of what life without Margot will be, his need to punish her and his frantic desire for the success of his perfect crime are all reflected in his anguished face and enhanced by the audience's own confused emotions at this time. This is one of the rare moments in the film when Tony is neither cool, self-confident nor in control. (It is typical of Hitchcock's irony that in this chaos, as the perfect crime is about to be committed, he shows us on the wall beside the phone box a portrait of the Queen, a symbol of order.)

The next few scenes reflect some minor changes but none of great importance. Some, such as a brief shot of Tony in a cab and another of Margot taking an aspirin in the bathroom, merely 'open up' the play. Others, such as the rearrangement of events and dialogue upon Tony's return home, tend to encourage more identification with him. Tony's call to the police is naturally heightened by the addition of shots of the cop on the other end of the phone. Hitchcock gives the policeman his usual menacing quality. When Tony says he does not know what has happened, there is a cut to the policeman saying, almost accusing, 'What do you mean, you don't know?' The question grates on us as it does on Tony.

Because Hitchcock shows us the police investigation, he is able to eliminate the play's morning after dialogue describing it. In this morning scene, Knott introduced some new characters. One, a reporter asking questions, is removed by Hitchcock, as are all references to the news media. (Later in the play, after Margot has been condemned to death, Tony has a telephone conversation with a reporter in which they negotiate the sale of Margot's letters and Tony holds out for more money. Hitchcock drops the allusion to the sale: at that point in the film, Tony is adjusting to life without Margot, has turned the failed perfect crime into another seemingly perfect method of achieving his goal, and has plenty of money to live on.)

During the morning scene, Inspector Hubbard (John Williams) is introduced on both stage and screen. Anthony Dawson (Lesgate/Swann) and John Williams are the only two actors who played their roles in both versions. Their performances are



Tony (Ray Milland) under suspicion

perfection, and Hitchcock makes no changes or additions to their characters. The director adds some visual humour to Hubbard, as in his fumbling, failed attempt to find a place to hang his hat, which ends in his settling for the cane in a stand, and in his dirty look at Mark when he finds his raincoat crumpled. This latter shot is more significant than it appears at first glance. It foreshadows the Mark-Hubbard competition in solving the case and offers an image both of Hubbard's superiority over Mark and his disdain for him.

After the four main characters have left for the police station, Hitchcock introduces the scene which even a casual viewer notices as a change from the play. This addition is, of course, the close-up of Margot, as off-screen voices indicate the progress of her trial and conviction. (In the play, we learn what has happened through a radio report which Tony hears in his flat.) The film's expressionistic scene is effective in black and white, but since its purpose was designed around the shifting colours, it is pointless for me to comment on it.

So far, we have paid little attention to the character of Mark. In the play, he is unquestionably a minor character. He is Margot's resigned former lover, and he uses his experience in crime writing first to devise a scheme which will free Margot and then to realise Tony's guilt. The film retains this function of the character, and he remains Margot's constant champion, but he also serves not simply as a bystander but as a seeming 'good guy' who is responsible for much of the havoc around him. Mark constantly interferes where he does not belong. In the play, of course, he hinders Tony by being sharp enough to come so close to the truth, but it goes much deeper in the film. Because Hitchcock has made Tony more sympathetic, Mark becomes more dislikeable. Robert Cummings, an actor who does not automatically generate a great deal of sympathy, is thus perfectly cast in the role.

From the beginning, we have seen Mark's sexual involvement with Margot. He has been defeated by Tony, and he stands outside the marriage circle. His attempt to expose Tony, then, is not merely an effort to save Margot but is more critically an attempt to prove his own manhood, to win in the sexual competition with Tony. Hitchcock makes these aspects of the character clear both visually and verbally. For example, when Mark comes to Tony with his scheme to save Margot (which as

we all know by now is the truth), Tony naturally reacts with surprise. 'Why should anyone want to murder Margot?' In the play, Max answers: 'Oh, one of the stock motives. Had Margot a will?' In the film, Mark first replies, 'Tony, I know that's hard for us to see because we both love her.' Hitchcock's addition of this line seems to have a number of meanings. As spoken by Cummings, it seems ironic, and the most surface interpretation of the irony is the absurdity of the statement (how can Tony love Margot if he is sending her to her death?). On another level, the line is true. Both of them do love her, in their respective fashions, but she has sexually defeated each of them. This statement is Mark's only admission to Tony of his feeling for Margot, and the irony therefore arises from the fact that, if it were not for Mark, Tony never would have planned her murder or secured her arrest. The dialogue surrounding this one sentence is essentially the same in both versions, and the simple inclusion of it is one of many examples where Hitchcock, by means of a very subtle change, switched the focus to his own concerns. Shortly after this line, the film retains Tony's accusation of Mark: 'It was because of your — association with her that she lost the sympathy of the jury.' The addition of the earlier statement gives this sentence new meaning.

In both versions, the most obvious change which has come about in the living room since Margot's departure is the addition of a bed. When Max enters the room in the play, Tony almost immediately explains that he moved the bed into the living room because 'everybody stops in the street and peers in at the bedroom window.' In the film, the bed sometimes dominates the frame. Mark takes visual notice of it, but neither he, nor Tony, nor later Hubbard makes any reference to its presence. At the key moment, when Mark has broken open the attaché case and has brought it to Hubbard's attention, his remark to Tony is both sneering and full of pity: 'No wonder you couldn't sleep in her bedroom any more.' The bed has obviously been on his mind since he entered the apartment, but he has said nothing. The sexual implication is nearly explicit, and Mark's statement, coupled with his apparent cracking of the case as he smugly goes on to analyse it for Hubbard, represents his feeling of sexual victory. He can afford to speak compassionately to Tony because, for the moment, he has won, and soon he will not only be in Margot's bedroom but in her bed. Because Tony makes no mention of the bed whatsoever, Hitchcock leaves the interpretation open; yet the bed is there, and the implications are inescapable.

Shortly after Hubbard has slipped back into the flat alone, Max joins him on stage by breaking in through the french windows. He is pursuing his own investigation. In the Hitchcock version, Mark lurks around outside and, when the time is right, humbly asks Hubbard to let him in. Max demonstrates a kind of heroic determination; Mark remains subservient.

There is another indication of Mark's character near the very end of the movie. After Hubbard has brought Margot into the room and explained that Tony had planned her murder, Margot wonders why she doesn't break down. Max answers in the

play: 'It's a delayed action, that's all. In a couple of days you're going to have one helluva breakdown.' The line merely offers sympathy and an explanation. In the film, Mark says: '... in a couple of days you'll have the most wonderful breakdown.' He smiles and puts his arm around her, obviously gloating in his victory.

Although the play's denouement (like the murder scene) is designed for visual impact and suspense, Hitchcock's alterations ironically weaken Frederick Knott's original intent. The theatre audience waits and hears Tony fumbling with the latch keys. Aided by Hubbard's comment 'He's remembered!' (the play's last line), the audience watches Tony enter the flat for the last time and enjoys the satisfaction of seeing him trap himself. Tony stares at Margot as she 'turns her head away from Tony and towards Max. Hubbard looks Tony up and down for a moment, then moves very slowly to the telephone and dials a number' (page 182). Since the 'stupid mistake in the perfect crime' is the point of the play, this is a proper ending.

All these elements remain on screen, but because we watch Tony both remember the key (shot through the bedroom window, from Hubbard's point of view) and retrieve it from under the carpet, the effect of his entrance is not the same. Hitchcock has removed the dramatic impact of the last scene in order to concentrate on Tony's reaction to the other characters and theirs to him. Once he realises that he cannot escape, he becomes again the charming man we have known throughout the film. There is a cut to a close-up of Margot's face, lined with tears. Does she cry only as a release from her horrible experience? Or do the tears result from her feeling of betrayal by Tony, a man she loved and with whom she tried to be happy? Or is it a real disappointment at losing Tony and realising she must now settle for Mark, not as a lark but permanently? Or does she weep because she realises that the sexual power she believed she exercised over Tony was broken long before she was aware of it? There is no

simple answer; Hitchcock has deliberately left Margot and her tears ambiguous. He never really explains Margot, but shows us only her own ambivalent desires and the effect she has on Tony and Mark.

Tony offers Hubbard a drink, but then slyly adds, 'Oh, I suppose you're still on duty.' The penultimate shot of the film is of Hubbard making a telephone call and combing his moustache. The last shot is of the young policeman, outside the flat.

The play *Dial M for Murder* is essentially a thriller whose mystery arises not from the 'whodunnit' question but from the problem of 'where did he go wrong/how does he get caught?' Using this element as a framework for his film, Hitchcock made it a subtle study of sexual relationships. As in so many of his films, he has taken the stock good guy and bad guy and coloured them with nuances, creating complexities which cloud the natural responses of the audience. He has also utilised the familiar Hitchcock situation of an innocent falsely accused of a crime. Margot, however, is not wholly innocent, being guilty at least of a kind of double infidelity.

Given the plot of *Dial M for Murder*, the theatregoer or reader has no difficulty in sorting out his own feelings at the end. He is glad that Tony, an evil near-genius, finally traps himself. His pity for Margot's situation is greatly softened by the realisation that she and Max will live happily ever after. The film viewer is allowed no such comforts. Hitchcock has made Tony too sympathetic for the viewer to be pleased with his downfall: he wants him to get away with it even though he knows Tony deserves to be caught. (A strictly moralist interpretation would explain the ending as part of Hitchcock's strategy to make the viewer deal with his own capacity for evil.) He cannot really believe that Margot and Mark will live happily ever after; nor, after knowing them, can he believe they deserve to. *Dial M for Murder* is not just a filmed play, or a 'straight adaptation'; it is a film by Alfred Hitchcock. ■

'... You'll have the most wonderful breakdown...' Cummings, Grace Kelly, John Williams



Pauline Kael
Doesn't Speak to
John Simon

John
Simon
Doesn't
Speak
to
Judith
Crist

Judith Crist
Doesn't
Speak to
Rex Reed

Before she became *Pauline Kael*, before she was much more than a wonderful surprise occasionally encountered in obscure journals, before she was canonized as America's best critic of film, Pauline Kael was the work of Andrew Sarris and the

movie man at *The Village Voice*. He, too, wrote books. One of them was *The American Movie*, a tension and elaboration

The year was 1963, the president on the

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THE CRITIC AS SUPERSTAR

John Russell Taylor

I suppose one must face the fact: the American film critic is news. Not every American film critic; only those based on New York enjoy a national celebrity. But for anyone used to the cloistered quiet of the world in which the London film critic exercises his craft, the amount of publicity which attends the New York critic, his opinions, his feuds, his private life even, is truly alarming. A first reaction (sour grapes, perhaps?) is that one would not want it or think it healthy. A second is to wonder why things should be as they are, and how it came about. While the firing of Pauline Kael from *McCalls* some years ago over an unfavourable review of *The Sound of Music* could provoke many column-inches of comment, and the brief career of Renata Adler on the *New York Times* was surrounded by a storm of controversy (should she have been hired? should she be fired? should she have been let go?), the whole London film press could probably be fired tomorrow without the general public turning a hair. Why?

The obvious answer is, because the opinions of the New York film critics are so commercially important. But obvious answers are not necessarily true. Some years ago, *Variety* had the amusing if not very meaningful idea of running an annual check on the 'reliability' of the critics by lining up their comments with the box-office performances of the movies concerned. In London, I think, the critics would tend to take the view that since they did not set out to be either fore-

casters or dictators of public taste, the results of such an inquiry could hardly be damaging; indeed, some would even take pride in their degree of divergence from the general public. But the New Yorkers were not amused, and complained so vociferously about the 'unfairness' of the procedure that the feature was quietly dropped. Fair or not, whether it did or did not provide an index to the success of any critic, it did at least help to establish, albeit crudely, that

there was no clear line-up between what the critics recommended and what the public went to see, or what the critics condemned and what the public stayed away from.

One could, no doubt, find exceptions to the rule. Occasions, anyway, where the right word at the right time has had an appreciable though incalculable effect in opinion-making. Pauline Kael's trumpet of praise for *Last Tango in Paris* in the *New Yorker* certainly did it no harm, working both in itself and through the resulting hubbub about whether she had in fact jumped the gun and stolen a march on her fellow critics to make the film in some way a *cause célèbre*. But one may doubt that Pauline Kael was directly responsible for the success of *Last Tango*; the film's inherent qualities must also have had something to do with it, including its usefulness as a porno movie for people who would never go to a porno movie.

The fact remains that there is no general correlation between the critical consensus and box-office performance, and the counter assumption is based largely on a misleading parallel between theatre and film critics in New York. Because of the special conditions which apply to attendance at the New York theatre, the critics—or just one critic, Clive Barnes of the *New York Times*—can close a show instantly, though even there it is doubtful if they can keep a show open and full (witness *Follies*). The film critics cannot exert so much influence, they know it, and from time to time they get touchy about it. There are instructive instances like the case of *Bonnie and Clyde*, where several of the New York critics, because they were not directed by Warners to regard it as a major movie (Warners were busy selling *Wait Until Dark* at the time), dismissed it as an exploitation piece and had later to climb inelegantly on to the bandwagon—a process praised rather bizarrely in the first of the annual volumes put out by the National Society of Film Critics as showing the extraordinary candour and integrity of critics who would thus honestly admit to an honest error.

But if the New York critics do not have all this attention paid them because they have the power to make or break a film commercially, why do they? Partly it is a side-effect of the still wildly expanding American academic industry of film study. A book like Edward Murray's *Nine American Film Critics: A Study of Theory and Practice* (Ungar, \$9.50) would be unthinkable in any other country, for where else would there exist a readership of many thousands teaching and learning about film for which this would be a desirable guide to texts in constant academic use? Seven of Professor Murray's nine critics were very much alive and kicking when he wrote the book (Parker Tyler died shortly after), and it is a rather curious experience to read his cool, dispassionate, academic adumbrations of the critical theories behind the scattered writings of John Simon, Pauline Kael, Dwight Macdonald, Andrew Sarris and such, some of whom, one suspects, may hardly be aware that they have a critical theory. Naturally, that is not much good to students, who are usually hot for certainties and like to know where everybody stands on everything before committing themselves. And in

particular they want to know the secret mechanism of being Pauline Kael or John Simon, not only because many of them will probably end up teaching them in some college or even high school, but because most of them would really like to be Pauline Kael or John Simon.

For there is no doubt that being a film critic, like being an air hostess or an Olympic swimmer, is an occupation with a glamorous image. And one cannot help thinking that there is something slightly suspect about the nature of its appeal. In the same way that one might tend to suspect the motives of a boy whose dream in life was to become a policeman: he could have worthy, socially responsible motives, or he could just like knocking people around with impunity. Recently I met a group of studio people reeling from the responses of a Berkeley student audience to a preview of *Murder by Death*. Why, I asked, did they take a straight entertainment film of this sort to Berkeley? Because they wanted a tough audience. But in the event they found that, even though the audience seemed to enjoy the film and laughed in the right places, when it came to opinion-gathering the split was 60/40 against the film, with commentators vying with one another in the slick brutality of their dismissive remarks. Easy to say 'A bunch of smartass students, what do you expect?'—which is true—but the fact remains that this reflects the image they have of the film critic as hatchet-man. To criticise means to criticise adversely, and the critic's degree of intellect and sophistication is measured, in a constant game of one-upmanship, by the fewness of the films he will actually admit to liking.

And if the image that the reading public receives is not necessarily exactly the image that the critics themselves project, the one inevitably has quite a lot to do with the other—as with television, all cannot be blamed on the defects of the receiving apparatus. If there is one thing that the New York critics have in common, whether it be Pauline Kael or Judith Crist, Rex Reed or John Simon, Vincent Canby or Jay Cocks, it is a perceptible impatience with shades of grey. Though Rex Reed is the one who most frequently gets into trouble with superior people for his wholesale best/worst-movie-I-ever-saw assessments (looking down a page of quoted raves in the ads for five or six movies at a time, one might be forgiven for thinking he should start a Masterpiece of the Month Club), it could also be said that he is merely the most direct about his attitudes, and I know one eccentric but perfectly sane film-maker who maintains that Rex Reed is the only real film critic we have. Certainly, when you come down to it, nearly everything any New York critic seems to write about is either wonderful or terrible. And it is the terrible that people remember, that makes news (how dare he say that about *Barbra Streisand*?), and that, to be fair, carries most conviction. For if critics are divisible into two groups, those who write best about things they like and those who write best about things they dislike, all the New York regulars with the possible exception of Andrew Sarris fall into the second category.

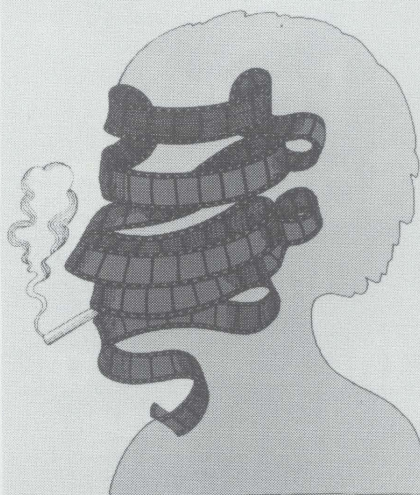
It does, I suppose, make one more excitingly readable over short stretches. And undoubtedly it attracts more attention

Pauline Kael Deeper Into Movies

Published 1973: Little Brown, Boston

if you are the only person saying that, e.g., *Adèle H* is lousy when everyone else is saying it is wonderful than if you are the only person saying that by and large, all in all, and taking into account some obvious deficiencies, *Conversation Piece* is really pretty good while everyone else is writing it off. It is only possible to create a sensation with a favourable review if you can contrive to be spectacularly the first to say anything, as with Pauline Kael on *Last Tango* and more recently on *Nashville*, where the controversy was not so much about the views she expressed in themselves, but rather about the ethics of saying anything on the basis of a rough-cut only. Again, a comparison with the London situation is instructive. I have always found it odd that the companies make so much fuss in London about not letting daily critics see movies ahead of time, for fear they might jump

1970: Simon and Schuster, New York



Confessions
of a Cultist: On The
Cinema, 1955/1969
by Andrew Sarris

the gun. Who, after all, really cares; how many films exist that are so newsworthy? The answer is all a matter of emphasis: it is not, in America, the fact of reading any advance review of *Nashville* that is newsworthy; it is the fact of seeing Pauline Kael steal a march on the rest and then waiting to see how they react. The exercise of personality is essential; what it is exercised on hardly matters.

I do not think that most of the New York critics have consciously sought this state of affairs, and several now insist that they find it uncomfortable and disturbing. But in a way they have brought it on themselves, even if it is not what they intended, by their habits of fighting among themselves and of writing in such a continuously first-person fashion. For making a name for oneself as a personality is to a large extent a confidence trick, and, like all the best confidence tricks, a trick that one plays on oneself as much as on anyone else. Take the title of Helen Dudar's article in January's *Esquire*, which marked a further stage in the personality cult of the New York critics. 'Pauline Kael Doesn't Speak to John Simon. John Simon Doesn't Speak to Judith Crist. Judith Crist Doesn't Speak to Rex Reed. Rex Reed Doesn't Speak to Anyone!' Who, finally, are all these people, and why should anyone care? No reasonable answer offers itself; certainly the insight into their social relations has nothing to do with their abilities or lack of them as judges of cinema. But if they assume with sufficient intensity that they are important, that personal feuds are lofty conflicts of principle, and that every serious person ought to care, then somehow it works out that way. As Miss Dudar cheerfully remarks, 'It would be hard to find another set of people so unapologetic about their egomania.'

One side-effect of this is a curious isolation from much that is going on in the world outside. Oddly enough, if there is one recognisable place where the personality cult of the New York critics started, it was probably what also seems to be the last occasion on which any current issue of critical theory or controversy really raised its head: the occasion in 1963 when an obscure occasional writer for highbrow magazines, Pauline Kael, attacked an obscure occasional writer for vaguely underground magazines, Andrew Sarris, for his dedication to his own form of the auteur theory. In the dearth of intellectual, or even generally intelligent, discussion of film matters which then prevailed, the article in *Film Quarterly* made news, the attack was taken up by Dwight Macdonald in *Esquire*, and both Kael and Sarris became names to conjure with. But as people, as personalities, not as representatives of alternative ways of looking at cinematic experience. Many of the people who recall that Kael and Sarris are old antagonists would be hard put to it to tell you what they were arguing about, or what the auteur theory was and is.

Since Andrew Sarris' early dip in the dangerous waters of European film theory, practically everything that has been happening in film studies, academic and otherwise, seems to have impinged on the New York critics hardly a jot. (Nor, for that matter, has it had much influence on film reviewing elsewhere, apart from a certain lip-serving

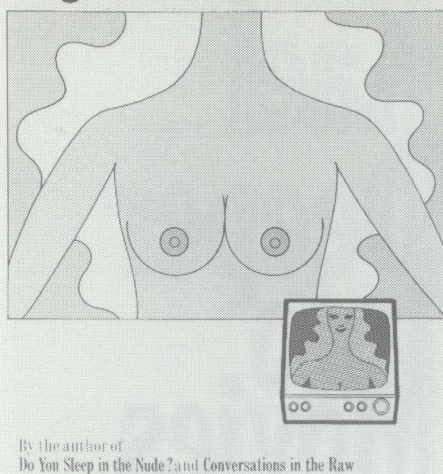
paid to the importance of the director, so that even the most popular papers feel it necessary nowadays at least to give his name.) Sarris himself remains true to the auteur theory, in the proper, unobsessed fashion, but with the passage of time has become himself an Establishment figure, as the *Village Voice* has moved from underground disrepute to solid respectability. But what of genre criticism, of structuralism and semiology? Even though some of the critics have read at least enough of some of the key books to review them, in practical terms they might never have existed for all the difference they have made.

Far be it from me to suggest that critics should embrace every new theory as it emerges—or any, if it does not suit their purposes and sensibilities. But it is very weird to teach film to groups of students who are busy reading Wollen and Burch and Metz and at the same time aiming to join a critical Establishment whose methods have not noticeably changed since *Garbo and the Night Watchmen*. Academic studies and practical reviewing live in two different worlds, and those worlds are getting further and further apart. The approach of the New York critics remains shamelessly literary, with heavy emphasis on the value of the subject-matter and as heavy an emphasis as the traffic will bear these days on personalities. True, it is difficult to get as interested in or as interesting about the personalities in today's cinema as it was with those of the 1930s. But this is where a dash of auteurism helps and why we are all a little bit auteurist: it gives a whole new range of personalities to play with, the directors as superstars. A discussion of *Barry Lyndon* can best be resolved into personalities, for instance, by concentrating on the enigmatic and newsworthy personality of Stanley Kubrick, since there is a limit to the interest to be engendered by Marisa Berenson as the darling of café society.

And if that takes the personal side of the discussion into a rather abstract realm—how many readers know even what Stanley Kubrick looks like?—that is also very much in accord with the tone of the times. Magazines like *People* and *W*, after all, concern themselves largely with personalities who do little except be personalities, a world in which names like Bianca Jagger, Jackie Onassis and Brigitte Bardot are the counters in some exclusive Monopoly game and where, even if we like to read about the doings of Elizabeth Taylor or Cher, that certainly cannot be taken to imply that we would necessarily spend money to see Elizabeth Taylor on film or time to watch Cher on television. Some of the pleasure to be derived from John Simon's more venomous pieces approaches the abstract: we appreciate his verbal dexterity in the savaging of objects, and when we read that since she has put on weight Cybill Shepherd looks like Mussolini in drag it hardly matters whether we can instantly picture the lady or not—in fact, it helps if we cannot.

I have often thought that an unacknowledged part of Simon's appeal resides in his being the last of the total male chauvinists, getting upset at the merest whiff of homosexuality, assessing female stars like so much horseflesh, and constantly nudging us to notice that though an intellectual, with those European degrees and all, he

Rex Reed Big Screen, Little Screen



By the author of
Do You Sleep in the Nude? and *Conversations in the Raw*

1971: Macmillan, New York

still has balls. And that way, generally the most palpable personality he is selling is his own, if only as the man you love to hate. It is all, to an extent, based on the old question of how a film critic, still thought necessary for whatever reasons of tradition or prestige, can continue to function for a readership which is not interested in films and seldom if ever goes to the cinema. The traditional New York answer, throughout the hard times of the later Fifties and the Sixties, was the advice Joan Crawford gives Lucy Marlowe in *Queen Bee*: 'Make personality—smile a lot' (or scowl a lot, according to taste). Thus the reader might have no interest in seeing the movie which was the ostensible basis of the piece (indeed if, as very likely, it was one of those foreign-language movies he would probably not even be offered a chance to see it), but he would still read to see what outrageous or extraordinary thing his paper's critic would find

1967: Macmillan, New York

Private Screenings

Views of the Cinema of the Sixties

John Simon

to say this week, in much the same spirit that earlier readers would turn to Godfrey Winn's column or, earlier still, the provocative journalism of Shaw or Chesterton. Subject counted for little, the writer's personality was all.

It is worth remembering that this is the situation into which most of the currently practising New York critics were first thrust. To make a way for themselves they had to sell personality, since they were certainly not selling movies. And this is the context in which Rex Reed, to judge by a recent 'Hollywood Fights Back' piece in *New York* magazine the writer most universally disliked by movie-makers, still has some claims to being the most straightforward. For the most part he does not claim to write reviews so much as features on film subjects with the occasional quotable quote. He is doing very much what the rest do, but at least he is doing it openly: not for nothing has he been called the thinking man's John Simon. This does not mean, of course, that the New York critics are prevented from writing intelligently and perceptively within their own terms, but merely that those terms are not usually those of film criticism proper. Pauline Kael can always be read with interest, provided one settles one's mind to receiving more illumination on matters social, political, economic, historical than on the quality of the film which provides the text. For her particular purposes a bad film can be as useful as a good film—perhaps more so, since in the nature of things it leaves more loose ends trailing.

The oddest thing, though, is that this time—if not otherwise) honoured interpretation of the film critic's job—ideas and/or personalities, 'readability' and quotability, and a brief formal bob towards the direction, good or bad, maybe the photography, pretty or undistinguished—now, in the mid-Seventies, seems quite anachronistic. Not because it fails to take account of Christian Metz, but because it does not relate to the changed circumstances of the cinema itself and the filmgoer. When we read in *Variety* that the numbers of admissions in American cinemas today are higher than at the height of the immediate post-war boom, when almost anywhere you can find silent classics, Bergman, select Japanese cinema and such on at least one television channel, and when a number of foreign-language, subtitled movies are getting wider distribution than ever before, it does seem possible, to say the least, that readers would stand for something closer to the apparent object, that of evaluating and interpreting films, than most of the national critics now offer them.

Making personality will always have its place, along with writing about personalities; everybody enjoys gossip, especially if it has some sort of intellectual respectability, like the excerpts from Truman Capote's new novel which are at present causing flutterings in the doves; and there will always be those people who cannot be bothered to see the play or film everyone is talking about at those fabled cocktail parties, but at least read the *Time* reviews. For those there are the growing band of television reviewers, who encapsulate in sixty seconds flat. The rest of us might like to read a little less about the critic, a little more about the film. ■

Television, the Integrity of Fact and Fiction

Norman Swallow

'The dramatised story documentary is one of the few art forms pioneered by television.'—Caryl Doncaster.

'To dramatised we must simplify. To simplify we must leave something out.'—David Lean.

'It is almost too easy now to dress someone up in a cloak and have them wandering on top of a mountain... It's a terrible cliché.'—Ken Russell.

Theology in the arts is frequently the child of necessity. When Caryl Doncaster wrote the words quoted at the head of this page she was working in a medium that was comparatively new, whose output came largely from a studio and was transmitted 'live'. Filmed inserts were possible but limited, film cameras were 35mm, the duration of each magazine was four minutes, and the soundtrack was invariably optical. One of the most effective ways of presenting documentary truth in television seemed therefore to be to offer it in 'dramatised' terms, using an acted script based upon thorough research; which was the technique employed by Caryl Doncaster herself in such programmes as *Return to Living* and *Pattern of Marriage*, and by Duncan Ross in his series on court procedure, *The Course of Justice*.

In television today, so it seems, almost everything is possible, whether on film or by the latest devices of electronics. Programme makers can vary their techniques more easily than ever before, and the ways they choose are no longer the ways of necessity. Those, like Denis Mitchell, who have remained loyal to the factual documentary, preferring it to a form of television which seems to them to be a dangerous compromise, have made their decision from a sense of integrity, and not because of any technical limitations. In fact Denis Mitchell's first film, a *Special Enquiry* on Britain's teenagers, was made in 1955, long before the introduction of the hand-held 16mm camera with the sound synchronised on quarter-inch tape.

When therefore Jeremy Sandford wrote *Cathy Come Home*, which was first transmitted in 1966, he deliberately chose the method of a film that 'would use many of the techniques of the documentary, but would none the less have a story line and be done by actors... Real people are often inarticulate especially when disaster hits them. There are flashes of emotion in a true-life documentary, but those flashes cannot be maintained throughout a film.' Denis Mitchell and others—including myself—would disagree with that view, believing that such programmes as *Morning in the Streets*, *Chicago* and *A Wedding on Saturday*

have proved that human emotion can in fact be sustained by real people in real situations, and for the length of a complete programme.

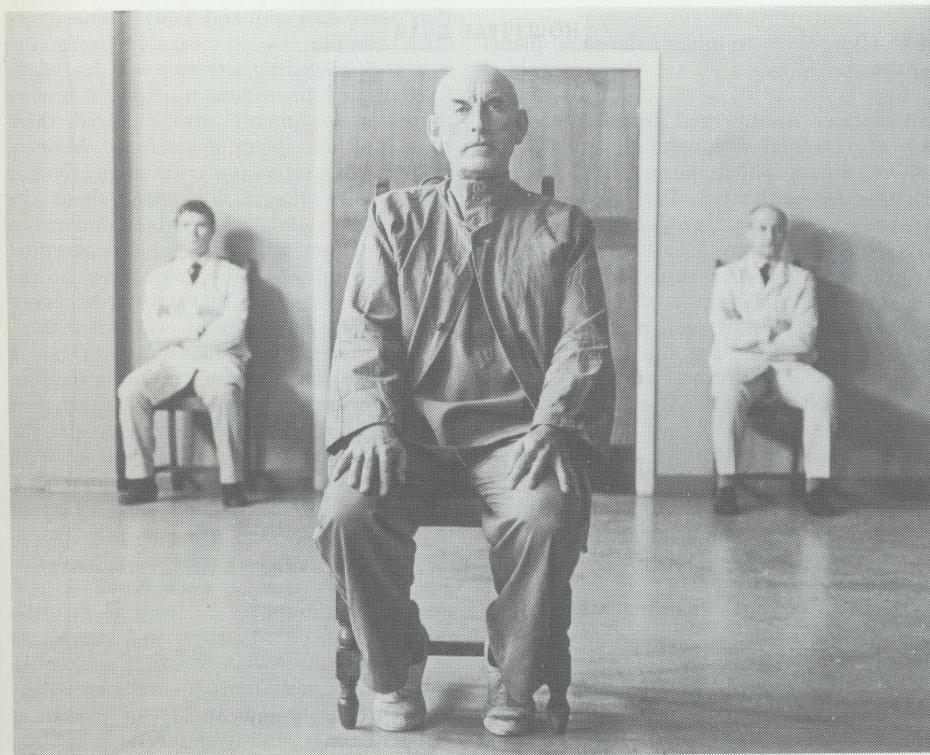
Yet *Cathy Come Home*, like so many of the films produced by Tony Garnett and directed by Ken Loach, was fine television by anybody's theology. But how true was it? Though based upon detailed and diligent research, it was attacked by many people professionally concerned with social welfare, and on its second showing, according to Irene Shubik's book *Play for Today: The Evolution of Television Drama*, 'most of the background comments giving statistics were in fact omitted because of doubts about accuracy.' Yet, true or false, it was successful enough for Jeremy Sandford to claim that 'as a result of the film and certain meetings which we held afterwards, Birmingham and various other towns ceased their practice of separating three or four hundred husbands per year from their wives and children.' Truth may not be the same as fact, but it is arguably more important and certainly more powerful.

It is in the area of which *Cathy Come Home* is a particularly good example that the boundary between fact and fiction is specially sensitive. Programmes presented under series titles like 'Armchair Theatre', 'Wednesday Play' or 'Play for Today' have sometimes been criticised on 'documentary' grounds because they deal with real issues, are made in a naturalistic style, and for many viewers seem to be a reflection of their own condition. *Days of Hope* may have offended some viewers whose social class or political persuasion differed from those whose lives were its principal theme, but for a particular industrial generation whose fate was determined by persons and circumstances beyond their control, the feelings it reflected were surely both tragic and true. The same comment could fairly be made of many of the best examples of the contemporary television play: *Mrs. Lawrence Will Look After It* by Tony Parker; *The Reporters* and *The Nearly Man* by Arthur Hopcraft; *The Evacuees* by Jack Rosenthal; *Edna, The Inebriate Woman* by Jeremy Sandford; *Through the Night* by Trevor Griffiths; and much of the work of Howard Brenton, John Finch, David Mercer, Alun Owen, Alan Plater, Dennis Potter, Neville Smith and Colin Welland.

Christopher Morahan, until recently the BBC's Head of Plays, has referred in a recent interview in the *Guardian* to the desire of many of the best television dramatists 'to change society—and I don't mean political change necessarily, but all the ways in which drama can work on people.' Jeremy Sandford said in the interview already quoted that 'any writer worth his salt seems to me to have a social responsibility... and it is good to know that I have altered, if only slightly for the better, the condition of life in my own society.' I genuinely admire his achievement. But as a documentary-maker I would suggest that the same proud claim could be made with equal fairness by those who work on *Man Alive* and *World In Action*.

Those television plays which seek to reflect or even to change our society must, if they are to be persuasive, contain a large element of 'documentation'. So in some

Factual documentary: 'World in Action' reconstructs the case of Pyotr Grigorenko





The authenticity of drama: 'Sam' (Kevin Moreton); 'Days of Hope'

cases the documentary element seems to predominate, especially when they are made as films and by directors who have already achieved reputations for themselves in the field of the documentary—like Michael Apted, Jack Gold, Brian Gibson, Michael Grigsby, John Irvin, Mike Newell and Michael Tuchner. Indeed this frequent interchange of talent from documentary to drama and back again has been one of the more creative aspects of British television and British cinema in the past twenty years. When Lindsay Anderson, Karel Reisz, Tony Richardson and John Schlesinger moved from documentary to the feature film the consequence was a startling sense of reality, a point easily proved by comparing *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, *This Sporting Life* and *A Kind of Loving* with those earlier films that had presented us as a class-ridden nation whose last war was won by officers and managers with gentlemanly voices, controlling other ranks and factory workers who spoke in the mock working-class accents of the West End stage. For another aspect of the documentary-drama relationship has been the creation of a new generation of actors, men and women

who really seem to inhabit the same planet as the rest of us.

So there is 'documented drama'; but there are also factual documentaries played by actors, but in which the words spoken are completely authentic. Perhaps the best remembered of these programmes were the *Trials* produced by Christopher Burstall, whose subject matter varied from Marshal Pétain to the aftermath of the events in Chicago in 1968. In such programmes the person responsible for the text is not a 'dramatist' or even an 'author', but an 'editor' or a 'compiler'. Mike Murphy called *The Pueblo Affair* a 'compilation', and his own copy of the script shows precisely the source of each speech or statement.

In 1973 Leslie Woodhead made a *World In Action* programme about Pyotr Grigorenko, a Russian sentenced to detention in a Mental Prison for 'slandorous statements and agitation against the Soviet state.' The technique used in the programme was described with scrupulous fairness in the words of an off-screen narrator: 'Grigorenko has managed to smuggle out from prison to his wife a detailed diary of his experience

... The story told in Grigorenko's prison diary cannot be checked in detail. We asked the Russians to comment. They declined ... So all the incidents and conversations which follow are exact transcriptions of Grigorenko's own words. Nothing has been invented.' When Robert Vas and Barrie Gavin produced their *Omnibus* programme about Solzhenitsyn, *The Writer and his Government*, they used a more stylised technique, so that a meeting of the Union of Soviet Writers was represented by a group of actors seated in what was clearly a television studio and reading from visible transcripts.

There was one notorious occasion when television theology almost prevented the transmission of a very fine programme indeed; a film about women in prison, compiled by Tony Parker, produced by Tony Garnett, directed by Roy Battersby and intended as a 'Wednesday Play'. Tony Parker had interviewed several women who had recently been in prison and later he based a book on the transcripts of his tape-recordings. Later still five actresses read and absorbed the words of the original women, and without the aid of a verbatim script re-enacted the interviews on location. Was this therefore a 'play', or was it a 'documentary'? It is a familiar piece of television history that its transmission was held up for two years because 'it blurred the border between fact and fiction.' When it was transmitted in a shortened version in 1969 as *Some Women* it received enthusiastic reviews, though the BBC was accused quite unfairly of adding 'an apologetic introduction' (*Daily Express*), and deleting one of the women for reasons which seemed to some critics to be highly suspect. 'It's an open secret,' wrote George Melly in the *Observer*, 'that the lady on the cutting-room floor is a Lesbian drug addict.' (I happen to know that Mr. Melly's suspicions were unfounded. The lady was dropped because she seemed to Tony Parker, Roy Battersby and myself to be the most theatrical and, in documentary terms, the least persuasive of the five.)

On transmission the words 'Wednesday Play' were dropped, and Tony Parker introduced the film, by no means apologetically, as a work played by actresses who had carefully studied his original transcripts. Among the press comments that followed there stood out the splendid words of Maurice Wiggan, then television critic of the *Sunday Times*: 'I'm always concerned about the tendency to smudge the distinction between fact and fiction, and could not have accepted this as a play... Whatever may be the rights and wrongs of that debate, it cannot be doubted that the result was mesmeric... This strange experience that was not a play, not a documentary, and not a sermon, was reporting raised to a level of art. But let all who would rush to follow ponder the indispensable integrity of the pioneer.' With which view I am in total agreement.

Integrity, of course, is easier to attempt than to achieve. But how precisely 'literal' do programme-makers have to be? A dramatist, constructing a play about a real person, would surely be justified in attributing to his hero words and statements which are authentic—meaning spoken in truth by the man himself—but chronologically inexact. Words spoken or written at different times, and over several years, can

be brought together in a single speech and still fairly represent the views and style of the person concerned. To use archive film out of its strict chronology seems to me to be a parallel situation. Robert Vas' film about the General Strike was vigorously accused of committing this particular 'sin', and so was the film that I myself produced with G. V. Alexandrov for Granada and Novosti about the Russian Revolution. We even dared to use sequences from feature films—and especially from *October*, of which Alexandrov was co-author and co-director with Eisenstein—though by the use of subtitles we faithfully admitted our sources. I believe that we still maintained our integrity. The attack on the Winter Palace in *October*, for example, is often dismissed as an exaggeration; but a reference to the number of men and women actually involved on that night in October 1917 suggests that Eisenstein's crowd scene is very accurate indeed. If I were to make a documentary film about the 1950s I would not be particularly worried if I used a general atmospheric sequence shot in 1953 and placed it in 1952. But I use that word 'general' very carefully. To misplace a precise public or political event would be inexcusable. 'Integrity' is indeed a very hard word to define.

Most of the programmes mentioned so far have been of our own time. But how does, and how should, television treat earlier periods of history? Were *Six Wives of Henry VIII*, *Elizabeth R* and *Edward the Seventh* 'drama' or 'documentary'? Or Peter Watkins' *Culloden*, which used actors within a current-affairs style, and of which Peter Black wrote in *The Biggest Aspidistra in the World* that it 'told the audience more about Scottish nationalism in an hour than most of them would have picked up from a hundred books'?

In those words of David Lean, 'To dramatise we must simplify. To simplify we must leave something out.' Cecil Clarke, ATV's Head of Special Drama, had this to say about *Edward the Seventh*: 'As far as authenticity is concerned, you have to set your sights at complete authenticity in all your pre-production preparation and thinking. You then have to decide whether complete authenticity is going to work dramatically, and make an interesting programme, or to what extent you are going to have to bend it to make it work. If we had done *Edward the Seventh* with absolute one hundred per cent authenticity, it would probably have ended up a rather dull programme; a historical document rather than a viewable series... Yet most of the phrases concerned and many of the things which might at first seem to be modern were, in point of fact, said, and came straight out of the records.'

Cecil Clarke's point is reinforced by the opinion of a critic of *The Times* in his review of David Jones' television biography of John Clare (for me one of the finest of all such biographies), which he thought was 'perhaps too literal'. No such criticism was levelled at Ken Russell's film about Delius, *A Song of Summer*, and it was the reviewer of the *New Statesman*, ending his comments with a proper praise of Maureen Pryor's performance as Zelka Delius, who came to this significant conclusion: 'When, at the end, she had Fenby wheel her forward in

her chair so that she could throw petals over Delius' corpse, the pathos and romanticism of the gesture gave her an extraordinarily poignant dignity. I wondered whether this scene actually took place in life, but decided it didn't matter. The truth was in the art, where it should have been.' Which is a generalisation as dangerous as it is stimulating. Fortunately the argument is academic; Dr. Fenby assured me that the event took place exactly as Ken Russell presented it. It was both dramatically moving and factually correct. Therefore it was good documentary.

Yet it was Ken Russell who said that 'It is almost too easy now to dress someone up in a cloak and have them wandering on top of a mountain.' So he 'sent up' the dramatised biography by making his film about Strauss, *Dance of the Seven Veils*. 'In this film,' he once said, 'you've got the two things: that Strauss put up with the Nazis and ignored the persecution of the Jews, and at the same time he wrote magnificent music... You either condemn the man or forgive him for the sake of the music. The film is really a criticism of the English and their attitudes to art and politics in that they have such conveniently short memories. The political stance remains forgotten while the music remains... One of the reasons why I wanted to do this film was that I'm sick of imitations of Elgar, with poets stumbling over ferns while they write... Amongst other things the film is a satire on the way television now treats artists and their lives.'

Dance of the Seven Veils was carefully described on the screen as a 'Comic Strip', but inevitably some viewers were baffled or even offended, and a few musicologists and television critics condemned the film on grounds which merely exposed the fact that they were considering something quite beyond their familiar terms of reference. Ken Russell went on to make films for the cinema which supported his confession that 'I might take off from the facts but there's always a factual basis in what I do.' Yet he was wrong in believing that his film on Strauss would be 'the biography to end all biographies'. They still continue: *Shoulder to Shoulder*, *The Edwardians*, a serialisation of the life of Balzac, *Churchill's People*, *Explorers*, and at least one very fine contemporary biography, *The Naked Civil Servant*.

In its handling of history and biography television has either followed a straight documentary path—as in most programmes in the *Chronicle* series—or has accepted the patterns already established in the theatre and the cinema. It has modified rather than revolutionised. Yet there have been a few exceptions to that generalisation, and especially in those programmes that have included both actors and 'real' people. Ken Shephard, in his programme about Edward Gibbon, allowed contemporary historians and archaeologists to appear on the sites of the Roman Empire in a film whose spine was the words of Gibbon himself, played in vision by Clive Swift in an eighteenth century setting. A few years ago Francis Coleman made a film about Rossini in which the composer, played by Guido Alberti, was 'interviewed' in Trouville by Robin Ray (as himself), and their dialogue was based upon the authentic memoirs of Ferdinand Hiller. Richard Marquand dir-

ected a film about Brendan Behan in which interviews with Behan's friends and relatives (as well as library film and photographs) were intercut with dramatised sequences from Behan's autobiographical writing.

In Fred Burnley's film on Scott Fitzgerald there was a central 'interview' with Fitzgerald, and there were scenes from selected stories and novels. The words spoken in the 'interview' had been either spoken or written by Fitzgerald himself. His part was played by Edward Woodward, Lelia Goldoni played Zelda, and both of them played the leading roles in the dramatised sequences, thereby suggesting a close link between the life and the work. 'This wasn't a drama,' Fred Burnley said of it, 'and it wasn't a play. It was a reconstructed and authentic account of what Fitzgerald was like, in his own words.' (A claim supported by the enthusiastic co-operation of Fitzgerald's daughter, Scottie.) This mixture of documentary and drama has been developed more recently by other programme makers, and today it has become a familiar form of the literary biography; it was used by Colin Nears in his films about Conrad and Kafka, and was essentially the method used by Tristram Powell in his essays on Katherine Mansfield and Ivy Compton-Burnett. For it is a perfectly honourable device, which has the additional merit of contributing to serious literary criticism by the way in which it makes its connection between the author and the work.

Truth is not the same as fact, but it is both more valuable and more elusive, and when the social history of our own age is written our television programmes will surely be one of the most valuable sources of archive material. *The Forsyte Saga* and *The Stars Look Down*, both based on works of fiction, may well prove to be more valuable, and essentially just as 'true' as many films and documents that are superficially more authentic. The historian of the future would be wise to examine *Sam*, *Days of Hope*, *The Evacuees*, *A Family at War* and *Cathy Come Home*. In this sense they are as valuable as the works of Dickens and George Eliot, the Brontës and Mrs. Gaskell, and they have the added merit of the visual presence of towns and countryside, the interiors of homes and the clothes of those who live in them—all recreated with the meticulous accuracy that is one of the outstanding merits of those concerned with design and costume in British television. Such programmes may be 'plays' and not 'documentaries', but they are the creation of those who care for their own time, and know well enough that their feeling for it is at least as essential as the letter of it. ■

'Days of Hope' (Paul Copley, Alun Armstrong)



MAYER, THALBERG AND MGM

David Gordon



Into the lion's den: the MGM studio entrance

What was Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer really like during the years that two men of widely different temperaments ruled over it? *Mayer and Thalberg, the Make-Believe Saints*, by Samuel Marx, recently published (W. H. Allen, £5.50), gives something of the feel of the place from 1924 to 1936. Another new book, *The MGM Story*, by John Douglas Eames (Octopus, £5.95), gives everything of the look of the product: it is the illustrated and annotated record of the 1,705 films made by MGM in the years from 1924, when the studio was founded, to 1974. The men behind the studio—and its films.

Those are two reasons for MGM's long success. There is another reason, often ignored: the soundness of the economic unit of which MGM formed a part. In the early 1920s, several of the entrepreneurs of the film business saw the logic of the combination—pioneered by Adolf Zukor—of (1)

film production, (2) distribution and (3) theatre ownership into an integrated corporation. And it was into such a combination—Loew's Inc.—that Louis B. Mayer brought his fledgeling production company in 1924.

L. B. Mayer had started in films as an exhibitor. He quickly realised that although he did pretty well out of showing films rented from the distributors, he would do even better if he was a distributor as well. But he then found that the problem was to find the product to distribute. This was a problem shared by other distributors. To help solve it, Al Lichtman, who had worked with Zukor, persuaded a group of them—including Mayer—to put up guarantees against which he borrowed money to finance producers. The films went well, and it seemed a sensible arrangement. So when Lichtman's company (Alco) went bust because he had been taken for a ride by a

sharp financier, the distributors formed another producing company, Metro Pictures. Mayer enjoyed this taste of production, and went to Los Angeles to set up his own company. In 1920 he moved into his new studios at Mission Road, to make films with Anita Stewart and Mildred Harris. By this time, Metro had been sold to Marcus Loew, a big New York cinema owner, but was not doing too well; Loew even came to Mayer for four films a year.

Mayer's programme grew and he began to look around for help. In February 1923, he hired Irving Thalberg as his production assistant. Thalberg had risen meteorically at Carl Laemmle's Universal Company, but Laemmle was worried by his daughter's affection for this sickly youth, and wanted him out of the way. The relationship between Mayer and Thalberg began with Mayer as boss, and Thalberg as his employee. This explains much of the subsequent friction between them. Mayer could never cede equality to Thalberg; but Thalberg felt, rightly, that he was the one who was burning himself up to fuel the studio's success.

In 1923 Mayer's production company was one among dozens, hustling for stars, directors and material. Then came the business partnership that transformed his prospects. Metro had continued to do badly and Loew was casting around for a solution. By chance he met Frank Joseph Godsol, the financier, who found himself with a studio on his hands when Samuel Goldwyn exited in 1922. Loew decided to buy the Goldwyn Company and merge it with Metro. The Goldwyn studio was well stocked with equipment, and with talent, but lacked someone to run it. Enter the Louis B. Mayer Company. Mayer became the first vice-president of MGM at a salary of \$1,500 a week, Thalberg second vice-president and supervisor of production at \$650 a week, and Robert Rubin, Mayer's lawyer and general adviser, New York representative of the studio at \$600. But in addition this Mayer group was to get twenty per cent of the profits of MGM. The division of this between Mayer and Thalberg became a running sore; but initially Mayer got ten per cent and the other two five per cent each. The contract was signed on April 10, 1924; Thalberg was 24, Mayer 39.

MGM was left pretty much to its own devices by Loew's. Production at Culver City was kept quite separate from the sales office in New York, which was kept separate from management of the cinemas. Integration of the company was financial: profits from distribution could be ploughed back into production. Ownership of a chain of cinemas meant that the corporation's funds benefited when they showed other people's hits. Risks were spread.

It was with this financial backing that Mayer could lay the foundation of his ambition, to create the best Hollywood studios. And for the strength of this ambition, credit is due. Thalberg, supposedly the inspiration for Monroe Stahr, is much the more fascinating character. In spite of recent criticism of the Thalberg legend, he still comes across from the growing pile of autobiographies of those who worked with him as a sympathetic character—partly perhaps because he got on so well with writers, who wrote the best

autobiographies. Anita Loos, for example: 'When I joined Irving Thalberg in 1931, he had turned all the inanity of Hollywood into excitement. He was like no other character in the entire film capital... He never put his name on any of his films and he forbade its use by the publicity department. Irving worked for the pure love of creating. Our collaborations with him were, to me, almost like love affairs. They had so many of the thrills, none of the drawbacks, and were certainly due to last longer.'

Mayer inspired little affection. He was a tough bully who put on display a heart of schmaltz when it was expedient to do so. The ability to coax, charm and wheedle, though not attractive qualities, were perhaps among those needed to run a huge studio. Marx tells the story of Robert Taylor's request to Mayer for a raise. When asked whether he got it, Taylor said: 'No, but I got a father.' Magnetic wonder boy, heavy-handed father. But it was the contribution of both men that set MGM on the path to fame and fortune.

Thalberg

Thalberg had an excellent instinct for seeing which of the dozens of treatments submitted to him every week would turn out well as movies. It was Sam Marx's story department that made the initial sift through the material—books, plays, original ideas. At story meetings, Sam Marx's colleague, Kate Corbaley, would narrate the story. According to Marx, she had the 'knack of grasping the theme that brought stories to life in the telling.'

Thalberg provided a very distinct concept for the film and then assigned it to one of his producers, who were called supervisors. Thalberg was undoubted controller of production, and the studio was efficiently organised so that he had all the buttons at his command. This was perfect for making a lot of films, and MGM rapidly geared up to cranking out a feature a week. The directors simply formed one department among others. According to Marx, team spirit was:

'Implicit in the studio's directing staff, and because of it, Thalberg relied on the director more than ever. Men like Jack Conway, Clarence Brown, Sam Wood, W. S. Van Dyke, Harry Beaumont and Robert Z. Leonard were solid contributors... They constantly jumped in to help each other and often embellished the work of their fellow directors. That would come about when one finished a film and moved on to direct another picture while the first was being edited. Then Thalberg would want retakes, and rather than recall the original director, he asked another to do the added scenes. It happened all the time. The retakes might be extensive, but the second director never demanded screen credit for doing the relief job. To be sure, the system had shortcomings; it wasn't one that appealed to directors accustomed to a less regimented way of making movies. Thalberg mistrusted men who preferred their own concepts to his and he lost the services of a number of exceptional directors because of it.'

The system did not suit Joseph von Sternberg and Maurice Tourneur. Buster Keaton, who unwisely gave up his independence, was crushed under it. 'You studio

people,' he told Thalberg, 'warp my character.' MGM films were given a gloss and a style, and were carpentered round the stars. Individuality suffered. Tod Browning made *Freaks*, but it was a freak MGM film.

It was the supervisors who were next in status to Thalberg. In the altercation between Keaton and the supervisor Thalberg had assigned to him—Lawrence Weingarten—Thalberg stood behind his supervisor. It was with them that Thalberg had lunch every day in the executive bungalow—Hunt Stromberg, Harry Rapf, Walter Wanger, Weingarten and, for a while, David O. Selznick. Mayer brought the reluctant son-in-law into MGM partly because he was worried about the strain on Thalberg, and partly to do a bit of dividing and ruling. Selznick had to swim against a tide of loyalty to Thalberg, and left after a short period, having poured his unhappiness out in one



Leo, the original MGM lion, with Maud Miller, visiting English journalist

of the more moving of his many memos (June 14, 1933).

Once Thalberg gave the go-ahead, a writer and director would be assigned to the film by a supervisor, always after consultation with Thalberg. When the script was completed, or perhaps when it was being written, Thalberg would have a look. Contrary to popular belief, Marx says, competing teams of writers were not commonly set to work on one film, though Selznick sometimes resorted to this practice. Once the script was marked OK by him, instructions went out to all the departments.

Thalberg regarded the finished film as raw material. He was a great believer in testing the reaction of the audience. If they did not like it, or failed to respond in the appropriate way, he did not hesitate to reshoot. He rarely bothered to see the rushes. He was too busy working on the next script.

Mayer

Mayer conceived the studio on the grand scale. According to Marx: 'The enormity of his plans required the formation of departments comprising executives, writers, directors, players, the technical know-how of cameramen, scenic designers, film editors

and all along the line to unit managers prop men, painters, carpenters, plasterers, electricians, transportation men, location scouts and experts of special effects. Overall production supervisors, budget estimators and accountants were sought. Studio police and fire departments were organised. Doctors, barbers and teachers for a school of child actors were needed... In this early period of the great build-up of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, the need for personnel became so prodigious that for a time, the hardest-working men and women were those engaged in putting new employees on the payroll.'

It was Mayer's overall planning that provided the facilities which Thalberg could command at the touch of a button. And Mayer had the flair for spotting stars. He found Garbo. He also took a deep interest in promoting their careers into stardom: 'Together, Mayer and Strickling moulded the image of MGM's contract players. The publicity department took all workaday tasks out of their hands. Letters addressed to stars and featured players (except the obscene, which were destroyed) were answered by ersatz recipients, usually with a fervent personal good wish. Members of the department became expert at imitating all signatures.'

The basic function of stars in the economics of the film industry is that they reduce risk; they provide the brand image to attract consumer loyalty, the only tag that indicates to the mass non-review-reading audience whether the film is worth seeing. Mayer's genius for publicity and showmanship led him to understand that some of this brand image could brush off on the studio itself. It was not just Garbo that could attract—Leo the lion, that brilliant corporate emblem, became the symbol of quality. From his experience as a distributor and exhibitor, Mayer knew that cinema-owners were obliged to buy films blind, and that the Lion would give the company's product an enormous boost in the market. Thalberg shared this passion for quality and class, and for creating 'more stars than there are in heaven' (the slogan that was dropped when someone pointed out it could imply that they were dead).

Mayer aspired to set himself into the firmament of the famous. He cultivated William Randolph Hearst—and got a favourable press for the company, at the expense of making films with Hearst's beloved Marion Davies. His friendship with Herbert Hoover was useful to the independent survival of the company; at one point when William Fox was trying to buy Loew's, Mayer cried anti-trust to his political friends in Washington, and this helped quash it. As a host for visiting potentates, Mayer was invaluable.

While Marx provides many new anecdotes on the Mayer/Thalberg era, the most thorough description of the relationship between the two men, and of the evolution of MGM, remains the two books by Bosley Crowther: *The Lion's Roar* (1957) and *Hollywood Rajah* (1960). Both, sadly, are out of print. While Marx's book is cool and understated, there is no doubt where his sympathies lay. He ends his book with the death of Thalberg in 1936 and with the chilling response of Mayer, now unquestionably the boss: 'Isn't God good to me?'

Film Reviews

Family Plot

'Everything's perverted in a different way,' Hitchcock has noted; and perhaps no other filmmaker has illustrated that postulate better, by starting from precisely the opposite premise. Without a well-established sense of the normal, the abnormal doesn't even stand a chance of being recognised, and the director has always made it his business to offer all the right signposts and comforts to guarantee complacency before proceeding to unhinge it. Yet one of the rules of this game is deception, and if the Master's artistry has been identified more with rude shocks than with the subtler conditioning which makes them possible, one can be certain that this too plays a role in his overall strategies. Since *Psycho* in 1960, his public image has largely been construed as a relish for nastiness that invariably associates violent death with the stylistic flourish, the director's 'touch' with the grandstanding set-piece—a tendency culminating in the rape-murders and potato-sack manoeuvres in *Frenzy*.

If in fact the public equation of Hitchcock with mayhem has established its own form of complacency, one of the triumphs of *Family Plot* (CIC) is to turn this cherished notion—along with several others—squarely on its head. A marvellously fluid light comedy with scarcely a slack moment, it blithely omits murder entirely, and its only death—of a secondary villain—pointedly occurs off-screen. In striking contrast to the sour distaste expressed for food, sex and virtually all the characters in *Frenzy*, the mood could hardly be more benign; and with explicitness systematically transposed from a visual to a verbal plane, practically every relationship in the film carries a pronounced erotic undercurrent.

Grasping after precedents, even most of the film's champions have labelled it only a minor achievement, commonly tracing its virtues back to *The Trouble with Harry* and regarding it as a kind of septuagenarian's garden sport. But apart from a certain echo of Shirley MacLaine's delicious kookiness in Barbara Harris' performance, and an uncharacteristic excellence in the acting throughout, it could be argued that the earlier comedy (one of Hitchcock's personal favourites) has more importance in his work than is usually admitted, as an oblique commentary on—and critique of—his more 'official' classics. And within this context, *Family Plot* can be seen as a veritable testament—a measured assessment by the director of his methods that, by evaluating what is and isn't essential to them, clarifies everything in his career preceding it. A central clue to this enterprise is offered by the film's working title, *Deceit*; its climactic expression is Barbara Harris' wink to the audience in the final shot.

The main title credits grow out of shimmering green shapes in a crystal ball while strings and a heavenly choir are heard off-screen; then the face of Blanche (Barbara Harris) appears inside the ball, and we find ourselves present at a fake séance—Blanche intermittently speaking in the male voice of her other-worldly 'control' Henry while catering to the needs of Julia Rainbird (Cathleen Nesbitt), a dowager of 78. A brief cut to Blanche peeking between her fingers instantly

alerts us to the deception—a dramatic form of illusion-making not unrelated to Hitchcock's—and we soon discover that Rainbird is offering her \$10,000 to find her dead sister's illegitimate son, on whom she wishes to bestow the family fortune. Leaving the house, Blanche steps into a cab driven by her shaggy boy friend George (Bruce Dern), a self-professed 'actor' reduced to hacking who scoffs at her references to Henry as though he were real—reminding her of the sleuthing he does to furnish her séances with facts—before she mentions the \$10,000, and alludes to his future 'performance' that night on the waterbed. 'Tonight,' he promises, 'you're gonna see a standing ovation'—and there is an abrupt cut to a mysterious blonde in black crossing the street in front of them, literally slicing into the plot at a right angle and thereby preempting the narrative.

The second plot features another couple, another deception: the blonde is Fran, a brunette Karen Black in disguise, collecting a huge diamond as payment for the return of the kidnapped Mr. Constantine, then returning by car with her own boy friend Arthur (William Devane) to their upper-class house, where they clean up the secret basement chamber recently vacated by Constantine. Sexual references run through their own dialogue: clearly more at ease with crime and violence, Arthur gloatingly remarks that initially danger makes you sick, 'then it makes you very, very loving.' As they start upstairs to bed, he coyly alludes to the diamond he's just hidden, stressing that she'll have to torture him to find out its location; and as the camera moves into a large close-up of the jewel, hanging from the chandelier, she says that she intends to do just that.

This comprises only the first movement of the film, with a great deal of plot yet to come—including the discovery that Arthur, a jeweller who long ago murdered his foster parents, is Rainbird's long-lost nephew. But already an intriguing double structure is well under way, with diamond echoing crystal ball, each couple counterpointing the other in terms of class and behaviour, and allusions to off-screen sex implying in both cases that the power relationships may be less obvious than they first appear. (Significantly, the bedrooms of neither couple are ever even glimpsed.) Further developing a visual/narrative rhyming structure first noted by Truffaut and Godard in *Shadow of a Doubt* and *The Wrong Man* respectively, and more recently appropriated by Rivette in the giddy construction of *Céline et Julie vont en Bateau*, Hitchcock creates a rigorous framework for demonstrating that deception and seduction are opposite sides of the same coin, and that every piece of exposition regarding one couple immediately affects our perception of the other. And whether it's Arthur picking lint off a policeman's jacket, Fran fixing gourmet meals for the kidnapped victims, or Blanche and George quickly devouring a hamburger supper, the behavioural charm of all four runs agreeably thick.

Thanks to the precision of Ernest Lehman's script, the movie proceeds like an immaculately polished mechanism that continually bears witness to the fact and wit of its own operations. Eliminating not only murder from his formula (and from the pedestrian Victor Canning novel *The Rainbird Pattern*, which served as his starting point), Hitchcock has pared down his devices to the point where whole areas of his expertise can be covered in single, functional shorthand notations. The hilarious gag of a headstone being carved to loud pop music is also an establishing shot into a scene at the caretaker's office; and just as the ringing of a doorbell at a crucial juncture registers as a terse summary of all his experiments with sound, a few inches of a bishop's red habit 'leaking' out under a car door suffice as a recapitulation of his inventive uses of colour. Best of all is a hair-raising sequence with Blanche and George in a car without brakes barrelling down a steep mountain road. An ultimate expression of Hitchcock's storyboard technique—clearly devised at a desk rather than during shooting or at an editing table—its suspense derives from algebraic essentials, where the purest kind of 'musical'

'A team of dotty bumbler . . .' Bruce Dern and Barbara Harris in 'Family Plot'



variations can be played on the threats of passing cars, culminating in a wonderfully timed procession of motorcyclists.

At the same time, it defines a pivotal moment in relation to our feelings for the heroic couple: a team of dotty bumblerers in contrast to the suave elegance of Arthur and Fran—perpetually embroiled in domestic spats, and usually figuring like seedy, not very bright opportunists as they clumsily follow the trail left by the missing heir—their absurdities are brought to a head in this moment of crisis, with Blanche nearly strangling George in hysterical efforts to hold her balance and George howling his irritation as he struggles to guide the runaway car. But it is precisely amidst all this low comedy and frenzy that we realise how little we want this crazy, lovable pair to die. When they subsequently emerge undamaged from the wrecked car and he lifts her into his arms, for once the old-fashioned Hollywood cliché has been proudly earned: the romantic couple from such earlier films as *The 39 Steps* has improbably been resurrected before our very eyes.

And where does Hitchcock himself figure in all this? We glimpse him earlier on, chatting with a woman in his familiar TV silhouette at the Registry of Births and Deaths, in a rural courthouse where George goes to collect a clue; and it might not be too far-fetched to identify him directly with Henry, Blanche's alleged 'control'. Who else is it, after all, who leads Blanche in a mysterious trance up the stairs in Fran and Arthur's house after the villainous couple have been safely locked away at the end, tracing a bee-line in a long dolly-and-crane shot to the hidden diamond on the chandelier? The film's ads declare 'You must see it twice!', and sure enough, an earlier clue is dropped in the adjacent garage as to how she theoretically *might* have discovered the jewel's whereabouts. Yet the issue of her psychic powers is deliberately left open, and perhaps a more apposite clue is offered by the strings and voices accompanying her trance-like walk—the same music heard during each of her former séances, and the epitome of that Hollywood 'mood' music justly famous for its fostering of illusions. But this time we become another one of her clients, along with George. Concluding this sunny tale of sex, money and death with her wink at the camera, Hitchcock cheerfully acknowledges his full hand and his trump card in the same play, slyly suggesting that the real question isn't whether we've been deceived but whether we'd like to have been. Either way, his luminous crystal ball provides all the answers.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

All the President's Men

A reputation as one of the most faithful and artful of movie adaptations has preceded *All the President's Men* (Columbia-Warner) to the screen. Beginning with Robert Redford's acquaintance with Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, and with their investigative reporting on Watergate for the *Washington Post* (long before publication of their book), through constant script changes and consultation with the reporters and the *Post's* editors during production, and a painstaking studio reconstruction of the paper's large and dazzlingly lit press room (with quantities of authentic *Post* waste paper shipped West to complete the picture), the film seems to have emerged as a remarkably pure distillation of the original. It touches on all the essential moves and revelations of the investigation, while allowing itself hardly any of the usual embellishments—a bit of comedy with an obstructive secretary is the most obvious.

But in dealing with so complex (and recent) a political phenomenon as Watergate, the film perhaps best shows its mettle by compiling its evidence with all the clipped allusiveness and atmospheric tension of classic mystery fiction.



'All the President's Men': Robert Redford, Dustin Hoffman

Having broken down *Klute* and *The Parallax View* into a succession of almost self-contained episodes, each striking with some unexpected shock against what had gone before, Alan Pakula seems to have found the documentary equivalent for *All the President's Men*. Such crisp dramatic counterpoint is part and parcel of the way he persistently restricts his canvas. The dark, cluttered spaces that enclosed the characters in the previous two films directly suggested their blinkered awareness. Here it is quite literally visualised in a flurry of early scenes, in which the reporters are tied to their office phones as they attempt to build a story on the arrest of the five men caught breaking into National Democratic Headquarters in the Watergate building on June 17, 1972.

Simply but effectively, the film boxes the audience into the same closed perspective, forcing them, along with the reporters, to batten excitedly on each new clue that can be picked from the jumble of disembodied voices. With Gordon Willis' tight but fluid camerawork, and the controlled edginess of the performances, Pakula closes in compulsively on a step-by-step progress through the maze, as Woodward (Robert Redford) and Bernstein (Dustin Hoffman) track the burglars to White House consultants Howard Hunt and Charles Colson and, by way of a brief detour through the burglars' base in Miami, trace their financial backing to the Committee for the Re-Election of the President, and up through its echelons from Finance Chairman Maurice Stans to Campaign Director and ex-Attorney General John Mitchell. (On the other hand, as Pakula has suggested, the most effective dramatic counterpoint to the investigative journalism on the screen is the audience's awareness of the outcome. Historical hindsight supplies the final connections between the mole-like labours of 'Woodstein' and the political parade which seems to pass by so imperceptibly on the TV screens, bracketed as the film is by two appearances by the exalted, apparently untouchable Richard Nixon.)

Rather more successfully than 'Woodstein's' own account, which tended to flatten even admitted personal disputes and crises of conscience into the surrounding mass of documentation, the film edges the investigation with a necessary minimum of personality. Apart from one or two actorish highlights—Bernstein's interview with Stans' book-keeper (Jane Alexander), ever so reluctantly co-operating with information about CRP's secret fund—Redford and Hoff-

man provide subdued but quirkily distinct character sketches. The reporters' lives are simply a function of their jobs, from which their personal surroundings are a brief, barely perceived retreat (a snippet from a broadcast on the Fischer/Spassky tournament heard in Woodward's apartment points slyly at less low-key prima donnas in the public eye).

One or two shots linger on the faces of the human material made use of by the reporters; and in the background, authoritatively functional support is provided by Jack Warden as Metropolitan Editor Harry Rosenfeld and Jason Robards as the *Post's* Executive Editor Ben Bradlee. The script makes a few more conventionally colourful attempts to characterise the President's faceless men being pursued by telephone. Woodward at one point mutters about Hunt coming 'in from the cold'. His mysterious secret contact 'Deep Throat' (Hal Holbrook), tells a story of one of the lesser conspirators, Gordon Liddy, holding his hand in a candle flame at a party, and announcing that the trick is not minding that it hurts. But apart from its curious echo of a scene in *Lawrence of Arabia*, the story pictures a character rather at odds with the book's presentation of Liddy as an ebullient bungler, and with Deep Throat's subsequent assessment of the conspirators: 'Forget the myths the media has created about the White House. The truth is they're not very bright guys...'

The controlled 'personalising' of the story works well in the initial stages of journalistic enquiry, and in the final scenes of bafflement and shock, when the reporters' eagerness to tie the conspiracy to the White House tempts them into jeopardy as they leap too soon at Nixon's Chief of Staff, H. R. Haldeman. The film's penultimate scene brings the reporters to confer with Bradlee on a darkened lawn about the possible danger to their own lives. But the method creates some fuzziness in the middle stretches, at the stage when what is needed is a synthesis of all the information on who controlled and who received money from the CRP fund, and of how it fitted in with Watergate and the 'dirty tricks' operation run by Segretti and others.

A greater drawback is the extent to which *All the President's Men* is, like *Jaws*, a 'phenomenon' film, and however brilliantly it organises its pursuit of its own Leviathan (the circumstantial investigation) is imaginatively limited by it. Pakula builds the film on a metaphor as

confident as the Space Needle sliding from behind the totem pole in *The Parallax View*. In the opening image, typewriter keys explode against paper with the effect of cannon fire, wittily reprised at the end with the artillery salute as Nixon is seen taking his oath of office on a TV set in the press room, while the hammering of the 'Woodstein' typewriters gradually overtakes the strains of 'Hail to the Chief'. But the metaphor remains a rather abstracted gesture to the power of the press, never becoming as powerful an instrument for transforming objective account into subjective experience as the political *trompe l'oeil* of *The Parallax View*, or its psychological equivalent in *Klute*, by which the investigators were steadily drawn in to become symptoms of the problems they were investigating.

Pakula essays flourishes here along similar lines—the camera steadily rising in an overhead shot of the reporters in the Library of Congress, eventually losing them in the ominously expanding architectural patterns; or Woodward taking fright after leaving one of his underground sessions with Deep Throat and fleeing from shadows. But they remain on the surfaces of a story that has been marshalled with dazzling skill and precision, but lacks the imaginative hooks that might have taken it even further in mood and meaning.

RICHARD COMBS

The Missouri Breaks

According to Marlon Brando, he saw his character in *The Missouri Breaks* (United Artists) as an opportunity for 'a serious study of the American Indian.' 'Gee, Marlon, not at these prices,' said Arthur Penn (referring to Brando's \$1.5 million slice of a sizeable budget), so Brando settled for having fun. In the event, the character he plays has become a sort of camp Buffalo Bill with an Irish accent, who makes his entrance playing peekaboo from behind his horse and at one point stalks his outlaw prey in a poke bonnet and dress; and the only reference to Indians in the script—possibly a hangover from his prototype character, and now inexplicably foreboding—comes when rustler Jack Nicholson tells his worried gang about having run across the fabled Pinkerton detective Charlie Siringo while on a jaunt to Wyoming.

Meanwhile, pending the arrival of manhunter Brando from Wyoming, and after an electrifying opening in which the local cattle baron piously hangs a young rustler for the good of his soul—a scene looking and sounding uncannily like a Sunday School picnic—the film itself coasts agreeably along, having fun too. After a fine, freebooting time in the breaks north of the Missouri River in Montana following the Civil War, the frontiers are beginning to close in for the outlaw. The cattle barons are starting to count their losses; the forces of law and order are beginning to organise; and the echoes of *Butch Cassidy* (shorn of the cuteness) are completed by a brilliantly funny railroad robbery in which Jack Nicholson finds himself confronted by a baggage clerk anxious to co-operate in unhitching the mail van but uncertain of his competence ('I'm just not mechanically minded'), then making his getaway leap unaware that the van has halted on a trestle bridge, and finally having to face the problem of transporting loot that came all in single dollar bills.

The change to a tone that grows perceptibly darker comes, paradoxically enough, with the irruption of Brando in a mood of pixillated extravagance as the 'regulator'—in effect a legal hired assassin schooled in long-distance killing for maximum efficiency and self-preservation—summoned by the cattle baron to deal with the rustlers. Perfumed and precious, given to birdwatching while squatting atop his horse with manual in one hand and field-glasses in the other, he yet contrives to evoke a sense of unease by his unpredictable eccentricities (on arrival, he interrupts a funeral to browbeat the corpse for dying too soon, then filches the ice in which the corpse is packed to assuage a toothache). A sense of unease that becomes the chill of fear as his sadism ('Smoke-meat!' he taunts a charred rustler he has just burned out of his cabin) is seen to be allied to a bizarre sexual perversion. (Alone at his campfire, in a scene of lonely despair worthy of Bresson's *Balthazar*, he dedicates a love song and a kiss to his horse: 'If the lips were Salome, and the eyes were Cleopatra...')

No less than the flail of God—God being the cattle baron, so referred to twice by other characters as he dons his Sunday black to dispense summary justice—he likes to kill with a harpoon shaped like a crucifix or with his long-range and hideously destructive Creedmore rifle (an apt name underlined by Jack

Nicholson's comment that it doesn't 'allow a man to make his act of contrition'), and even addresses Nicholson as 'angel' in a coy moment when the latter has the drop on him. Though drawn together into a tight knot by the fact that the territory where Brando begins his really murderous operations goes by the name of Hell's Gate, these scattered biblical references (ambivalently assigning the role of Lucifer to either Brando or Nicholson, depending on whether God's in his heaven or not) are less the central focus of the film than a Manichean comment by Brando: 'I believe life is like a mountain railway... cos' you don't know what sleepy sonofabitch's got his hand on the throttle.'

Although actually set in the 1880s, Thomas McGuane's brilliant script operates on a sort of sliding time scale, reaching back to the early pioneer days or forward to the present to illustrate the implications of this proposition. At the very beginning of the film we are vouchsafed a glimpse of God's country: a vast, empty prairie as the cattle baron and his captive rustler ride endlessly out of the distance to crest the hill like the Mormons gaining their first glimpse of the promised land in Ford's *Wagon Master*. Before proceeding down into the lush little valley for the execution, the condemned man and his judge share a moment of quiet ecstasy as they gaze on this beauty, to preserve which one must kill and the other must die. And in a few lines of dialogue describing how he arrived in a wilderness and now has a vast library of classics back at the ranch, the cattle baron carries us forward a hundred years.

The story of how wealth, culture and influence conspire to create more sleepy sons of bitches reaching for the throttle is taken up by a poor farmer in Hell's Gate who buys some rustled horses and quotes Thomas Jefferson's dictum about how the father clears the ground for the son, before projecting his own aspirations into a playboy vision of society: 'I raise cattle so my son can be a merchant so his son can go to Rhode Island and buy a sailboat and never see these goddam mountains again.' Spelled out like this and divorced from the characterisations that give them body, these historical and theological allusions doubtless sound more schematic than they are, in presenting the thesis that all the sons of bitches who have used violence to keep their hands on the throttle are now seeing the horror boomeranging. But in any case there remains the basic ambivalence. Setting off a petrol bomb to flush out a human torch, Brando's Robert E. Lee Clayton (another apt name) is clearly America in Vietnam; but he also at various times sports an Indian head-band and a coolie hat, and his obscure inner torment suggests that, in these alter egos, the Luciferian revolt may be on another footing entirely.

Along with *Kid Blue*, and of course Barry Lyndon in another genre, *The Missouri Breaks* is one of the few recent films to have attempted to render the flavour of period lighting (shadowy golden-browns for the oil-lit interiors, echoing the landscape burning up under the Montana sun), while at the same time avoiding the mistake made by nearly all Westerns under the influence of the dingy, dusty settings favoured by Ince and Griffith (Penn's little farm towns and mining villages are impeccably ramshackle but constructed out of new, rawly cut planks). And in another departure from tradition, Ford especially, the womenfolk are rarely waiting patiently back at the ranch. Although the raunchily innocent heroine (beautifully played by Kathleen Lloyd) is much too open-handed for the film to be accused of misogyny, it undoubtedly takes a bleak view of the matriarchy. Apart from the cattle baron's runaway wife (whose flight from his rectitude has plunged him into puritan mania), the most notable representatives of the gentle sex are two sweet old ladies—one in black with prayer-

'The Missouri Breaks': Marlon Brando with lethal harpoon



book in hand, the other in grey with steel-rimmed spectacles pushed up on her brow—who guard the bordello from intrusion by the embarrassed outlaws. Taken together with Brando in his poke bonnet, snuggling down after a day's murderous labour murmuring 'Granny's tired,' they suggest that what the film is really talking about is the rape of God's country by Whistler's mother.

TOM MILNE

Hollywood Cowboy

In two quietly original, perfectly scaled comedies, Howard Zieff has contrived to give the impression that he does not so much direct films as turn them out like a skilful but almost invisible prestidigitator. Excellent scripts and performances, left to themselves, don't always add up to the subtle alchemy of a good picture. But both *Slither* and *Hollywood Cowboy* (once, and more fetchingly, *Hearts of the West*) marshal the two with a lack of fancy footwork which seems to suggest that the trick is simply to keep a firm sense of proportion and not to allow the personality of the work to expend itself too quickly, by giving its all to make every joke register.

Not that the humour of the two films even registers in the same way. *Slither* possibly takes the more interesting tack, with a capacity for ducking down byways that are abruptly left unexplored. And the nervous, off-balance sense of the film's progress quite visibly extends to the characters, who have been set on their way in a road movie where the greatest threat is not the ancient tanker looming in the rear-view mirror but the feeling that, even with one's hands tightly clenched on the wheel, the tyres are still inexorably sliding away underneath. Superficially, things are more under control in *Hollywood Cowboy* (CIC), partly because a nostalgic photographic glow softens the edges of unpredictable behaviour, but mainly because Rob Thompson's script takes a straighter route into fantasy. At times it strays dangerously close to some stereotyped notions of what might happen to a hopeful young Iowa farm-boy, Lewis Tater (Jeff Bridges), who aspires to write Western fiction but lands by accident in Celluloid City (circa 1930), where he finds a profession (bit-player in cheap Westerns), falls in love, is betrayed by a friend, and finally has his rumbustious style of 'Western prose' recognised.

The last event is a slick enough nod to convention, given that the film consistently makes light of what Lewis is hammering out on the typewriter ('The Kid, a Colt in either ham-like fist, scattered lead at the retreating dust'). But somehow the ending works, both because the actual substance of Lewis' dream matters less than the energy with which he pursues it, and because Bridges makes such disarming work of the dedicated writer as simple farm-boy, capable of flourishing in the tawdriest of circumstances. And as a picture of Thirties' Hollywood, the film largely takes its tone from the hero's pragmatic enthusiasm. An advertising mural for *Anna Christie* ('Garbo talks') decorates one city wall, but all the show-biz dreamers here have entered through the back door of the factory, and the poverty-row production line serves Lewis as usefully—as a place 'to soak up a little Western atmosphere'—as it does the temperamentally intense but corner-cutting quickie director Kessler (one of the best excuses yet for Alan Arkin's exercise in dynamic irascibility and grandiloquent insecurity). But the presiding spirit is clearly Howard Pike (Andy Griffith), the ageing bit-player who had his own day as a Western writer, and who tutors Lewis in the economics and group ethic of this new line of work.

For all that Zieff assembles these solid ingredients with a minimum of fuss, he does



'Hollywood Cowboy': Blythe Danner, Jeff Bridges

have a way of turning the simplest device to quietly expressive use. Most characteristically, he begins a shot with a close-up of some significant detail, then draws back to visualise its comic implications in a neatly compacted scene. Thus, at the beginning, Lewis' decision to leave home is announced through the publicity brochure—for the correspondence school in Western writing that will lure him to Titan, Nevada—being read aloud by his father, while the zoom back reveals Lewis steadfastly unconcerned by his two brothers falling about in mirth, or by his father's increasing agitation at the thought of the money that is about to fly out of the window. Having later wound up on the payroll of Tumbleweed Productions, largely through the good offices of Kessler's script-girl and chastely ministering angel Miss Trout (Blythe Danner), Lewis eventually accompanies the latter back to her apartment, struggling with a large cardboard box containing a prize she has won—which turns out to be a radio mounted with a lamp and stand in the form of a hula dancer, whose hips go into a manic wiggle when the contraption is switched on. The idiotically suggestive motion serves as a perfectly incongruous motif for the tender seduction scene which follows.

What finally, rather indefinably, hints that Zieff's talent goes further than a skill for packaging sound scripts and performances is the sense of how the modest scale and carefully preserved limitations of his films serve as an unusual sounding board for the comic material. The off-beat quality of *Slither* largely derived from the disbelief of the hero that he could become embroiled in anything so outlandish as the plot that seemed to be unravelling round him, and from his discovery that the point of it all was nowhere near as appreciable as the trouble it involved. His equivalent here might be the unfortunate heavy of the piece, the confidence trickster (Richard B. Shull) who runs the correspondence school and who is amazed, after Lewis escapes with his money, that his tactfully restrained villainy could involve him in the strenuous shenanigans of a gangsterish chase. The final straw, when he at last tracks Lewis down, is not that he should have lost his money but that his associate, in a moment of panic, should pull a gun and start to use it. Led away by the police, he protests neither guilt nor innocence but simply his embarrassment that things should have got so ridiculously out of hand.

RICHARD COMBS

Mes Petites Amoureuses

French artists seem peculiarly attracted to the mysteries of childhood and adolescence; in literature one thinks immediately of the luscious worlds conjured up by Proust and Alain-Fournier, in which characters are surrounded by a complex mesh of wistfully remembered sights, sounds and scents: in films, there is *Zéro de Conduite*, *Les Jeux Interdits*, *Les Mistons*, *Mouchette*. Now Jean Eustache contributes his considerable pennyworth in *Mes Petites Amoureuses* (Gala), a film which has long been in mental preparation. The mammoth, bracing *La Maman et la Putain* reached the screen in advance purely because it could be made for much less money; following its success, the 2,500,000 francs needed to budget *Amoureuses* finally became a concrete reality.

At a superficial glance, the film could be taken for a sad, nostalgic idyll: the opening sound is of Charles Trenet singing 'Douce France', and Nestor Almendros' photography makes the song title seem perfectly apt. Village streets and neighbouring fields are dappled with sun and shadow; no rain cloud darkens the skies. The soundtrack is as full of open air as the images: crickets chirp, wind whistles through the trees. The story-line equally suggests a recognisable mood and pattern, with its young hero stumbling towards adulthood and sexual experience. Thirteen-year-old Daniel (Martin Loeb) moves from a happy village childhood (living with his grandmother) to a small town adolescence (living with his mother and her silent Spanish lover). His experiences with girls become bolder: from practical jokes (like firing a toy gun at their heads) he moves on to fondle them, kiss them, and eventually he lies down with a dark beauty in the long grass. At the end he returns to the country for a holiday; the girl he used to eye pushes his hands away from her breasts, and he joins his other friends romping innocently in the fields, feeling much older and wiser.

Under its beguilingly familiar surface, however, *Mes Petites Amoureuses* remains as stern and uncompromising as its predecessor. France, in fact, is anything but 'douce', and Eustache dwells on the boredom rather than the excitement of adolescence, the desperate wanderings from diversion to diversion. And the diversions happen mechanically, almost without emotion: suddenly, and inexplicably, Daniel punches a schoolmate in the stomach and receives a blank look in return. When he

enacts a circus trick before his pals (lying down, like the strong man, on broken glass), his audience only manage to look faintly bewildered. Once Daniel leaves for the town, life becomes even more desultory and the boy's face assumes the set features of boredom. Deprived of schooling through insufficient funds, he idles away the hours 'helping out' in a cycle repair shop; outside work, he finds his pleasures visiting the cinemas (the town is blessed with four of them), strolling hopefully down an avenue traditionally set aside for pick-ups, lounging outside a café with fellow layabouts, swapping cigarette packets and stories of sexual exploits. The exploits themselves are passionless, interrupted affairs; for full-blooded romance we have to turn to the films Daniel sees, such as Albert Lewin's *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman*, where Ava Gardner disports herself in a series of dizzily bizarre images.

Eustache's directorial style emphasises the bleak daily round of his hero. The narrative proceeds through a succession of short scenes separated by quick black fades, pin-pointing confrontations and gestures with Bressonian force (though the style also attractively points up the humour inherent in much of the material—as with Daniel's circus trick). The elliptical approach serves a further purpose by focusing on the random comings and goings of the community; people unhurriedly walk by, meet and pass on—a kaleidoscope which conveys the atmosphere of Daniel's environment without any recourse to heavy local colouring. This slow-motion choreography of characters works most remarkably in the climactic scenes, when Daniel and a friend leave their comrades to pursue two village girls along a country road, only to be pursued in turn by the friends they left behind. With the minimum of dialogue, a battle of rival courtships ensues, riveting in its truthfulness and lack of rhetoric. Yet Eustache doesn't always maintain such a firm grip on

events, his obvious identification with Daniel leading him to harp on the boy's listless manner a little too heavily at times, with the result that the audience sometimes experiences a twinge of listlessness itself. But on balance *Mes Petites Amoureuses* offers a distinctly cool, delicately nuanced study of a human being undergoing that strange process called 'growing up'.

GEOFF BROWN

Execution in Autumn

Li Hsing's *Execution in Autumn* (Kai Fa, U.K.) is a spare masterpiece, which confirms the suspicion that Chinese cinema outside the more accessible action genre offers a pleasantly daunting vista of untapped riches. Li has been directing since 1963; after an initial entry into the cinema with films that were well received critically but were commercial failures, he has since been devoting himself to romantic melodramas often derived from the works of the Taiwanese novelist Chung Yao, and always with strong social themes.

A tale of moral regeneration, *Execution in Autumn* essentially confines the bulk of its action to a single set, the prison in which its protagonist is held, with occasional asides to the family mansion in which his iron-willed grandmother schemes his release. The plot is simplicity itself. Pei Kang (Ou Wei) is sentenced to death for the murder of a woman who may or may not be attempting to blackmail him into supporting a child she claims is his. As his trial falls at the end of autumn, the death sentence cannot be carried out until the following autumn—a rule established by tradition and imperial decree. His grandmother plots to save the Pei house by wedding him to his adoptive sister Lien Erh while he is in prison. Paradoxically, this

desperate and even unnatural measure proves the source of Pei's moral growth. Come autumn, he is able to face death confidently and alone.

Although the film is set during the Han dynasty, Li's concerns (unlike those of Chang Cheh or King Hu) are in no way historical. Eschewing too the sensationalism that the more popular reaches of Chinese cinema thrives on, his film has the pared down qualities of theatre without any attendant staginess. Li raises what could have been rendered (and is at a textual level) as a straightforward confirmation of the Confucian virtues of endurance and obedience to an evocation of terror in the face of mortality. Owing much to the performance of Ou Wei as the dishevelled, ungovernable Caliban-like central character, Li is able to frame his film with an eye rather to fundamental mysteries than comforting certainties.

Throughout, the director coaxes his material towards a sense of estrangement. Thus the curious loping gait of the figure we observe fleeing through the forest (Pei), which is slowly revealed to be caused by the shackles on his feet; the unannounced blazing anger with which an ageing woman (Pei's grandmother) hammers at the prison door; the astuteness with which Li shifts our perspective on his protagonist in the opening sequences; the ambiguity of the flashback from the courtroom to the sequence in which Pei confronts the woman he is brutally to murder. This latter sequence circumscribes the crime of passion within the lucid geometry of the court (which only Pei's headlong rush towards the magistrate on the pronouncement of sentence is allowed to profane); and opens with a luminously pure close-up of the woman victim which effectively questions the explanations of blackmail and intimidation that follow. Here Li imbues the 'explanatory' flashback with layers of mystery, playing with notions of fragmented narrative as Pei's version of the event, which itself runs somewhat obliquely to what we see on the screen, is interrupted by questions from the magistrate and interpolations from the defence counsel, which colour and even twist the 'evidence'.

Similarly bold is the handling of Pei's instant vision of freedom during an escape attempt, or the uncompromising development of the film's argument by way of the subsidiary characters of his fellow prisoners: the thief (who in a nice touch is revealed to 'know' Pei: 'I've been to your house, you wouldn't have seen me. I came only at night . . . to pick up a few things') and the scholar whose Confucian ideals mark, in a sense, Pei's goal. Pei is the perennial terror-stricken child on the brink of abandonment—I hate her for spoiling me. For never beating me. For being too good to me. For freezing to death,' he chants, on hearing of his grandmother's death. For all the script's patness in this area, he does not simply progress from 'thief' to 'Confucian'.

Li's control over the film's structure is likewise assured, the whole operating almost as a flashback from the opening long shot of the ritual autumn execution of an unnamed, unidentifiable victim (Pei?), and the sense of the passage of time registered in such a way that the film's opening premise assumes the dimensions of a philosophic postulate rather than a simple analogy. The grandmother's power wanes, her spirit exorcised by Pei's dawning consciousness, and she dies after waiting outside the prison in the snow for the marriage to be consummated, while within he refuses, in a scene of almost tangibly growing awareness, simply to beget a child on Lien Erh.

With its sense of intensely cloistered action (visually the bars of the prison are simply replaced by the lattice work of the Pei house), *Execution in Autumn* confronts the ideal and the experience of the family but disconcertingly establishes a vision of its fragmentation. A very fine penultimate shot neatly sidesteps notions of action simply 'coming full circle' by precisely not 'matching' the prologue's shot of the mourn-

Martin Loeb (centre) in 'Mes Petites Amoureuses'



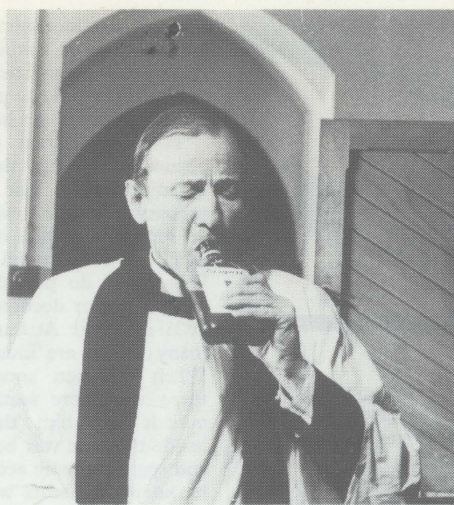
ing mother and child that follows the panorama of execution. Li implicates the audience in Pei's fate by smoothly directing the gaze with which Lien Erh follows his progress to the scaffold on to us and, breathtakingly and quite unambiguously, holding it there.

VERINA GLAESSNER

Devices and Desires

Independent British film-makers continue to find rich material in the nooks and crannies of British life, away from the political and social battlefronts. In 1971 there was Philip Trevelyan's marvellous *The Moon and the Sledgehammer*, which uncovered the Page family living wild in the wilds of Sussex, tinkering with steam traction-engines; more recently, David Furnham surveyed *Noted Eel and Pie Houses*, still supplying plate after plate of pie, mash, eels and heapings of green sauce to ravenous Londoners. Now Giles Foster (like Trevelyan, a former student at the Royal College of Art) provides another exploration of British peculiarities with *Devices and Desires*, a fifty-minute film based upon the diaries of the Rev. John Skinner (1772-1839)—one of the many wayward Anglican clerics who populate history books, novels and (occasionally) newspapers.

Skinner's diaries reveal him as a highly troubled man, besieged on all sides by his family, his servants and his parishioners (whom he terms 'perverted people' and 'vermin', among other things). There are reports of queer household quarrels—he launches into one of his sons for drinking excessively, only to be attacked in turn for his pointless antiquarian pursuits and awful poetry; a practical joker sends him a rusty nail wrapped in paper; villagers tie a tin can to the tail of his dog; Roman Catholics and Methodists provide further distractions. 'Everything seems tottering around me!' he wrote in



Frederick Treves in 'Devices and Desires'

1830. Nine years later, things tottered so much that he shot himself.

Foster's version of Skinner goes by the name of Granville Moulton (though with joking blasphemy he tells a bookshop assistant that the G stands for God), and he lives—theoretically—in the twentieth century. In fact, most of his time is spent in the years before Christ, trying (like Skinner) to find proof that Camerton was the site of Camulodunum, capital of Roman Britain; he pores over books in his study, excavates in a field—clashing with a local farmer who needs the land for grazing. Periodically he stands before his meagre congregation ('a miserable nosey bunch of heathens,' he calls his parishioners), perfunctorily reciting the prescribed services.

The establishing scenes deftly capture the lonely pattern of Moulton's existence and the

odd turns the pattern takes: he comes straight from his digging to the vestry, deposits his spade, dons his robes, takes a swig of brandy and stamps into the chancel; back at the vicarage, he switches on the answerphone (a ridiculous device for him to have, considering his desire for privacy), resumes his archaeological research and becomes the victim of a practical joke (a milk bottle is wired up to his front door and is smashed when he answers the bell). Frederick Treves plays Moulton with a dogged understatement which brings home the character's private world more effectively than any histrionics; Foster's style is comparably restrained, steadily proceeding from simple shot to simple shot (and using Camerton locations), giving just enough time for their impact to be felt.

However, once the film advances and other characters are introduced, things go slightly awry. Stephen (Jeffrey Daunt), the bookshop assistant who spent nine months at a seminary and is filling in time before reading religion at university, seems too much of a scriptwriter's pawn, deposited into the situation to spark off old memories and prejudices in the vicar's mind. While their strange, hesitant relationship is delicately drawn, one can't help wondering if there weren't neater ways of exploring Moulton's life and mind. Despite this, Foster continues to find images and gestures which encapsulate the man's isolation—his look of pained resignation as he pronounces the words 'when two or three are gathered together' (before a congregation of two or three), the shot of him pulling the bell rope and flicking a dislodged piece of dirt from off his head. Although Granville Moulton cannot compete with his nineteenth century counterpart for sheer weirdness, he comes over clearly and unnervingly as a man adrift from normal relationships and feelings; in painting his portrait, Giles Foster displays a sturdy yet sensitive talent, worth every encouragement.

GEOFF BROWN

Cannes 1976

from page 150

to everyone. There is nothing in the film that even comes close to *Empire of the Senses* in explicitness. But, unlike the Japanese film, this is not presented as an extreme case, the characters are not exotically Asian, and Jancsó presents their goings-on as something both positive and positively desirable. That was going too far.

Then, too, there were the long dance-pageant sequences; there were similar sequences in 1900 which people also found hard to take. Maybe the explanation can be found in the well-known continental distaste for American musicals. They have never been popular and have generally been shown only in art houses. It is only now, years later, when the best numbers have been packaged as in the *That's Entertainment* series, that Cannes audiences can accept them. But what Jancsó and Bertolucci are both doing partakes of the same aesthetic as the best of those numbers from the old days—even though the content is different. The opening night gala audience at Cannes went wild for *That's Entertainment Part II*, even though thirty years ago they wouldn't have gone near the films from which it was extracted. Maybe in twenty years time someone will make an anthology film of 'Great Moments from Marxist Musicals'—and it can open the 50th Cannes Festival.

There were two 'metaphysical' road pictures in competition: Scorsese's *Taxi*

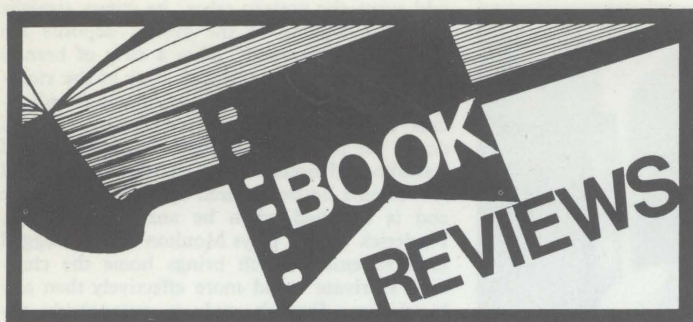
Driver, in which the roads are the night streets of New York, and Wim Wenders' *Im Lauf der Zeit* (also known as *Kings of the Road*). 'The Americans have colonised our subconscious,' says one of the Kings of the Road in Wenders' film, when he finds some pop tune running insistently through his head. But they have not colonised Wenders. There are many similarities between his film and a number of John Ford pictures (*Two Rode Together* would have been a perfect title had it not been pre-empted by Ford), but the film remains solidly anchored in German reality, and in a kind of realistic German filmmaking tradition of which the most distinguished example is Fritz Lang (to whom there are many references in the film). Lang plus Ford equals Wenders? Something like that, except that Wenders is unique.

Bruno (Rüdiger Vogler, who has acted in almost all Wenders' films) lives alone in his pantechicon and his job takes him all over the backwoods of Germany repairing projectors in small-town movie houses. Robert (Hanns Zischler) is a new recruit to the legions of men without women. He has just left his wife in Genoa, and Bruno meets him as he is rather ineffectually trying to commit suicide. The two men tacitly agree to ride together for a while. Each of them has accounts to settle with the past, and each gets to know himself better through contact with the other. But this is not a 'buddy' film: the real problem remains that of the women neither seems capable of living without, and finally they split up.

Their relationship has become comfortable, except that neither can go on pretending that the problem—women—does not exist. Somehow, both will have to come to terms with it: the open road and cosy male companionship is not the answer, neither of them is an easy rider. With this film Wenders has finally conquered his place in the German sun, right up there with Herzog and Fassbinder.

Other films, such as Hitchcock's delightful *Family Plot* (the closing night gala picture, reviewed elsewhere), will be in London shortly. The main event of the Festival was definitely Bertolucci's 1900. It was shown halfway through, and it divided Cannes more spectacularly than any film in years. Rumours flew around during the second week: one newspaper reported that Bertolucci was going to cut it down to three hours, but that was firmly denied next day. The public screening of 1900 saw it come out higher on the audience poll than any other film in the festival. The French press reaction was quite unfavourable, the Italians were almost unanimous in their praise, while the Americans were mostly lukewarm. The eventual fate of the film remains to be seen. Shown out of competition, it wasn't eligible for any prizes, but I think the 1976 Cannes Festival will be remembered as the year of 1900; just as, in spite of the Grand Prix going to *La Dolce Vita*, 1960 turned out to have been the festival of *L'Avventura*.

RICHARD ROUD



BOOK REVIEWS

THE RISE AND FALL OF BRITISH DOCUMENTARY

By Elizabeth Sussex

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS, £6.50

'The great thing about documentary is not what we did in England but the fact that we happened to light a bonfire... People got the idea and started lighting a similar bonfire elsewhere, the trick being that, of course, documentary is of use to governments...' That is the authentic note of John Grierson, speaking on tape to Elizabeth Sussex, from whose pages he emerges with an alarming resemblance to Sir John Reith, determined, ruthless, a great public relations man, a politician in the sense of being a manipulator of levers within the system but in actuality a fence-sitter whose political astuteness was, as Elizabeth Sussex notes, 'always of a sort that eluded identification with any specific party line.'

So it is natural that he should have boasted to her that, 'as a politician, I think the best operation, the neatest operation I've ever been associated with was the founding of the National Film Board of Canada. That was a tidy operation...' He had, of course, 'the great advantage of having the support of the prime minister.' In these terms he was indeed a clever politician who, as he claimed, 'used documentary, the use of realistic cinema, to purposes.' The question is to what purposes?

On the one hand, by 1924, Grierson claims, he was 'on to it that film could be turned into an instrument of the working class'; on the other, as Basil Wright testifies, one of his directives at the Empire Marketing Board was to 'sell to the British public the idea that cocoa comes from one of our great colonies, the Gold Coast, and do it... in either five or seven minutes.' The unreflecting cynicism of that directive is paralleled in aesthetic terms by his instructions concerning Len Lye's immensely exciting abstract film, *Colour Box*: 'Paint the new rates for the parcel post on the last sequence and then we'll put it out as an advertising film!'

Governments were not the only source of patronage in Grierson's eyes; there were other agencies which saw 'the value of using it [documentary film] to illustrate their interests or to create loyalties of one kind or another. The great

example is, of course, Shell Oil.' The example he gives of Shell's understanding of 'its [documentary film's] implications in terms of social welfare' is interesting and typical. Shell had found that in the Persian Gulf it took two men to lift a bag of cement. Therefore, says Grierson, 'they were in the nutrition business.' That is one way of putting it, and a strange one coming from a self-styled Clydeside radical; the other is to say that documentary film could be used to increase the level of exploitation of the Arab workers.

Grierson claims in his large vague way that he and his followers had 'got on to the social problems of the world,' that they were *engagés*—with what, for what ends? The British documentary film has failed, he stated, because it 'hasn't got an intelligentsia that can really go and tell the people in sugar... why logically they are concerned in a particular educational or inspirational purpose.' This is a line of thought which led him to believe that community television, which he saw as a means of achieving some sort of participatory democracy, should be sponsored by 'the people who run the local industries.' It is, to use a suitably Scottish phrase, a far cry from this to the concept of film as an instrument of the working-class. It is a pity that Elizabeth Sussex did not apparently have the desire, or perhaps the political awareness, to push him a bit on his 'radicalism', and at the same time to have spared us such idiocies as his view that 'the image of all beauty is that of a woman walking on the high hills of Poona.'

Given the tenuous nature of Grierson's political engagement, it is merely an illustration of the ineptness of British security that a member of Special Branch was planted on the Empire Marketing Board Film Unit as a trainee editor. Basil Wright told Elizabeth Sussex that most of the people working there were 'politically conscious', but what precisely that meant is still veiled today with retrospective tact. As one veteran says, they were operating 'very indirectly'. They were, in fact, caught uncomfortably between their political stance—broadly anti-Fascist—and the demands of the sponsors with whom Grierson did his deals. Paul Rotha emerges as one of the few among them to have had a clear idea of the drawbacks of sponsorship, to be aware that 'finance

always conditions what you say in a film,' and to comment that in *Night Mail* what one remembers 'is the train, not the people in the train... not human beings.'

Today the great sponsors of documentaries are the television organisations; their patronage presents, as those who work in or for them know, its own political and editorial problems. What they do provide, however, is a public for documentary films, even if as Sir Arthur Elton said many of them are 'illustrated talks'. When Grierson announced that there was more seating capacity outside the film theatres than inside them he was both mistaken and speaking more accurately than he knew; the seats were in front of the television screens.

One of the unanswered questions in this collection of interviews with survivors from the founding generation of documentary film is why so few of them were able to make the transition to the new medium. But it is, in general, a book that asks few of these questions and takes the reader not much further than anecdote and naive reflection. In that sense it is a disappointment. The stories are familiar by now—how the letter-sorting sequence in *Night Mail* was shot in a studio (so much for realistic cinema), how Grierson disliked Jennings, how Paul Rotha discovered industrial England and for the first time showed its realities on the screen. What is needed now is a critical history which will evaluate the achievement and the confusions of the men and women who made a particular and justly celebrated contribution to film-making.

STUART HOOD

MUYBRIDGE: MAN IN MOTION

By Robert Bartlett Haas

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS, \$18.50

Of all the many fathers of cinematography, none had a more colourful history than Eadweard Muybridge. Born plain Edward Muggeridge of Kingston-upon-Thames, he changed his name bit by bit to its eccentric mediaeval style. (Literally to the day of his death people were to get it wrong. Robert Bartlett Haas points out that his memorial slab at Woking Crematorium reads 'Maybridge', and the cremation register 'Eudweard'.) He emigrated to the States, set up as a bookseller and publisher; was injured (and maybe permanently affected psychologically) when he was flung out of the Overland Mail coach on the wild trip from San Francisco to the Mississippi. After recuperating in England, he bounced back to become one of the most distinguished photographers of his day in the United States. He photographed Alaska for the War Department and recorded the tragic Modoc Indian war. He created a series of magnificent

views of the Yosemite valley and the beauties of San Francisco. His pictures, says Mr. Haas, represented 'the collective vision of an optimistic nineteenth century America, made tangible in art.'

At that point his career very nearly came to an end, for in 1875 he faced trial for the murder of his young wife's lover, an adventurer called Major Harry Larkyns, of unappealing style. Muybridge was found not guilty on the grounds of justifiable homicide; and with the power of recovery that marked all his career went on to accomplish his most famous work, the analysis of animal motion by means of 'chronophotography'. The first experiments were done under the patronage of the Governor of California, Leland Stanford. After a break with Stanford, the work was continued at the University of Pennsylvania, where Muybridge created the 781 plates for his masterpiece, *Animal Locomotion*.

The colourful side of the history was none of Muybridge's seeking. From all accounts he was a quiet, earnest, somewhat secret man, single-minded in his ambitions. The colourful history stuck, for all that, and has tended to obscure Muybridge's ranging achievements. As a still photographer he would be notable even without the studies in *Animal Locomotion*. In this work, however, this apparently self-educated man revealed himself as a scholar, scientist and engineer of integrity and accomplishment. His photographs of motion were an astounding revelation to scientists, artists and the nineteenth century vision at large. They are still unsurpassed; and the magic of those images of athletes and fair women, freaks and cripples, horses and birds and beasts recorded in motion ninety years ago, 'unveiling the flow of movement', remains. They have inspired artists from Meissonier to Francis Bacon, for whom 'This remarkable Victorian classic... is... what a breviary is to a priest.'

Muybridge's exact place in the prehistory of the cinema has been debated on and off these last eighty years. The certainty is that he was the first to analyse movement into series of still images; and his Zoopraxiscope of 1879 came as near as anything did before 1895 to the reconstitution of series images to produce an illusion of living movement on the screen.

Muybridge had to wait seven decades after his death in 1904 for a worthy biography. Now he has two, not to speak of Thom Anderson's film study, or the magnificent catalogue of the recent Stanford University exhibition. (Not to mention, either, another attempted biography which Mr. Haas, with kindly understatement, calls 'Kevin MacDonnell's graphically deceptive and highly inaccurate *Eadweard Muybridge: The Man Who Invented the Motion Picture*.')

It is hard to choose between Mr. Haas's book and Gordon Hendricks' 1975 *Eadweard Muybridge: The Father of the Motion Picture*. Second to none in admiration of the standards of scholarship which Gordon Hendricks has brought to pre-cinema studies, I must finally conclude though that Mr. Haas has the edge on him—even if Haas's illustrations are not as many or as imaginatively varied (though they are better reproduced). The detail and documentation are fuller; and Haas provides a remarkable evaluation of everything that has ever been written on Muybridge.

Haas had the particular advantage of collaborating in the early days of his quarter century of research with Janet Pendegast Leigh, daughter of Muybridge's defence lawyer at the murder trial, who 'had been brought up by her widowed mother to love and respect Muybridge as her father had done, and to understand the principal issues of his personal life and professional career.' His own devotion to his subject is evident, and gives his narrative an appealing warmth, without ever blurring the general clarity of his analysis.

In one odd particular Gordon Hendricks has made a discovery that eluded Mr. Haas. Mrs. Muybridge had a son—the paternity remained somewhat vague—to whom Muybridge gave the characteristic name of Helios Floredo Muybridge. Father and son saw little of each other; and Floredo lived on until 1944 when he was run down by a car and killed. Both Haas and Hendricks relate how Floredo was given to boasting of the gold watch that had been given him by his famous photographer father. Hendricks, though, has established, sadly, that the old Ingersoll was in fact made some years after Muybridge's death.

DAVID ROBINSON

THE OXFORD COMPANION TO FILM

Edited by Liz-Anne Bawden
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, £10.00

A BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY OF THE CINEMA

By David Thomson
SECKER AND WARBURG, £8.50

Intended 'to answer any query which may occur to the amateur of film,' *The Oxford Companion* is both lavishly produced and expensive; so costly in fact that the only place one can foresee it definitely landing is the library shelf. One wonders if this does not thwart its main purpose, since its usefulness must depend on its immediate accessibility. The editor has aimed at a comprehensive alphabetical index with entries on (among others) selected films, countries of production, technical terms (invaluable, clearly defined references to unfamiliar processes such as *seppot* and *roll-back mixing*),

special topics (propaganda, archives etc.), as well as widely diversified listings of artists from most aspects of the cinema.

These individual entries are far from complete, though they do attempt 'to offer the most effective picture of the subject.' As it happens, the sections devoted to cameramen and composers show the *Companion* at its weakest, the appraisals hardly beginning to convey personal styles and usually opting for little more than an inadequate sprinkling of titles. The general classifications under countries or film types, which of necessity give only the bare outlines, are often concise and informative but occasionally their brevity leads to inexactness, as with an unsatisfactory mini-history of Animation where, referring to MGM and Warners cartoons of the 1940s, one finds the misleading statement, 'These films were not unlike Disney's in style and technique.' The critical content is disappointingly conventional and bland, including predictably extensive coverage of over-familiar figures like Chaplin, Eisenstein and Fellini, but only skimpily ineffective assessments of, for example, Corman, Feuillade and Wajda.

Even more irritating is the short shrift given to such talented directors as Dieterle (of whose work we are amazingly told, 'the biographical films he directed at Warner Bros. were the best of his prolific Hollywood career'), Henry King, Christensen and Teshigahara. The inclusion of these unworthy, and sometimes misinformative, appreciations, coupled with the omission of essential names like Harry D'Abbadie D'Arrast, Malcolm St. Clair and Samuel Taylor, indicates that the degree of comprehensiveness stopped short of those artists for whom an extensive amount of original research would have been necessary.

The ultimate question is whether to buy the *Companion* in preference to other similar dictionaries, and in this respect its production values are a decided asset, with only some blurred and inaccurate colour reproductions marring an otherwise superb job. The error quotient is about average: without actively searching for them, one notices that some of the more obvious mistakes have inevitably crept in (*Accatone* for *Accattone*, Ted for Tex Avery, Nicholas for Nicolas Roeg, etc.). In the end it depends on what one wants. The *Companion* undoubtedly has its uses but it has definite limitations too; which is to say it is much the same mixture as before and that, for me, one more opportunity for a truly exhaustive index, with complete film listings, has been squandered.

In contrast to the *Companion*, the emphasis in David Thomson's *Biographical Dictionary* is on criticism (not one illustration in over 600 pages). It is selective because the entries are restricted to directors, producers, actors and actresses.

The author outlines his intentions in a disarmingly honest introduction in which he refers to the book as *A Personal, Opinionated and Obsessive Dictionary of the Cinema*, an admittedly lengthier but far truer title than the one on the cover.

Thomson makes few claims for the comprehensiveness of the filmographies included, stating that only those on directors are intended to be complete listings of the original titles. Since some lesser known titles appear only in translation, whilst others have slipped through his net entirely, he was wise to keep it modest. Enough said on this score, however, because of greater significance here is the text. An inveterate film addict who (presumably) makes compulsive notes on everything he sees, Thomson writes economically and entertainingly whether he is for or against, and his memory is phenomenal, making it easy to forgive the occasional howler (for example, confusing Kurosawa's *The Bad Sleep Well* and *High and Low*).

His justification for writing the *Dictionary* is the hope that the reader 'will be caught up in his own opinion by what I say.' It is the sort of book which infuriates as often as it pleases, but also one which finds time for affectionate tributes to Victor Mature ('an incredible concoction of corned beef, husky voice and brilliantine') and Angie Dickinson (his favourite actress). Personally, I was pleased

to find Fellini castigated for the overblown, facile bore he has become, horrified to read an unconvincing and unrelenting diatribe on John Ford, and satisfied to learn I share the same opinion on the distinctive talents of Borowczyk, Linda Darnell, Jerry Lewis, Rafelson and Sylvia Sidney. I am not so sure about Thomson's oblique promise in the introduction of more to come, but as far as this opinionated opus is concerned I am with him all the way.

DAVID BADDER

ET POURTANT JE TOURNE...

By Claude Chabrol
LAFFONT, PARIS, 39fr.

THE MILOS FORMAN STORIES

By Antonin J. Liehm
INTERNATIONAL ARTS AND SCIENCES PRESS, NEW YORK \$15.00

The first movie Chabrol saw, at the tender age of four, was *Anthony Adverse*, and he was scandalised to discover—young love is dashed when the handsome *jeune premier* is killed in a duel by the horrible old husband—that the edifying precepts instilled by his parents weren't entirely to be trusted: the virtuous didn't always live happily ever after, nor were the wicked always punished. At around the same time, aged five, Miloš Forman saw his first film, a silent



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version of Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*: 'It was as though I had offended my fairy godmother and she had decided that I'd get my first taste of art from an opera in which there was nothing to hear—just a lot of flamboyant gestures with no meaning.'

Without being too deterministic about it, it is obvious (as Chabrol acknowledges, but Forman and Antonín Liehm fail to notice) how relevant these initiatory experiences are to all those Chabrol movies in which moral and aesthetic values are turned upside-down for the greater confusion of right-minded audiences, and all the Forman ones in which characters are busily saying nothing as they fail to communicate in a flurry of flamboyant gestures.

Contributing a volume to Laffont's 'Un Homme et son Métier' series in which someone (lawyer, racing cyclist, monarch, boxing manager) talks about himself and his profession, Chabrol begins by saying that he has no intention of talking about technique; and as it turns out, very little about his own films (though there is a brief section on each of them and he constantly returns, fascinatingly, to his conception of form in the cinema). Instead, seeing himself as the architect whose design is executed under his often improvisatory orders by a team of technicians, he proposes a new discipline in which he is the world's greatest specialist: 'la chabrologie'. 'C'est pourquoi je vous parlerai de ma grand-mère, de mon étourderie, de Simenon, de ma haine de la class politique... tous ingrédients qui entrent dans la composition de mes films.' You may hate those films and not give a damn about the film-maker, he says. But if you want to know why he makes them that way, 'il faut me connaître, assemblage, comme tout un chacun, de facteurs héréditaires et d'acquisitions, enfant d'un milieu, d'une culture, d'une éducation, possédant un certain tempérament, ayant ses admirations, ses mépris, ses états d'âme.'

Idiosyncratic, often wildly funny, his memoirs reveal a juvenile Chabrol who is clearly a sibling to the eccentrics of *Les Cousins* or *Les Godelureaux*: abstractedly wandering into the wrong class at school, for instance, to the derisive amusement of the other pupils, and promptly exploiting the situation to the full ('Anyone who is not afraid of being taken for a cretin can do pretty well anything he likes'); or, after a serious illness which left him for a time without the use of his legs, learning to propel himself about on his bottom with his arms as oars ('A routine I still perform rather well, though I'm not often asked'). As he grows up, the seemingly random recollections of his schooldays, of the genteelly drunken grandmother who only once emerged from her shell of placid *douceur* (to refuse an arranged marriage and demand the man she loved), of the *Beau Serge* village where he lived during the Occupation and the books,

plays and films he admired, are gradually shaped by the increasingly opinionated prejudices and predilections, in which tenderness and mockery go comfortably hand-in-hand, into an astonishingly lucid portrait of the Chabrol whose heroes and heroines are, like himself, a logical mass of contradictions.

Completed by interviews with several of Chabrol's regular collaborators (Rabier, Guy Chichignoud, his assistant, his script-girl, his production manager), and by his answers to the celebrated 'Proust questionnaire' (occasion for a brief but brilliant discourse on his admiration for Balzac, Henry James, Simenon and Philip K. Dick), *Et pourtant je tourne...* is indispensable literature for anyone interested in Chabrol's films. It leaves one, though, anxious for another book in which he could go through his work film by film, explaining the more or less geometrical conception of form which he describes particularly tantalisingly in the journal devoted to the shooting of his latest film, *Les Magiciens*.

Also valuable in its way, *The Miloš Forman Stories* is ultimately less satisfactory. Partly, one suspects, because Antonín Liehm seems to be a peculiarly humourless editor and interviewer (the reviews of each of Forman's films which follow the relevant autobiographical chapters are astonishingly dreary); and partly because 'the stories' seem to reveal less about Forman himself than about other people, less about why his films are so peculiarly his than about the problems he had in making them. The copious footnotes gathered into a final chapter called 'Stories Behind the Stories', detailing the problems and personalities behind the Czech film industry in its various ups and downs, are undoubtedly helpful in explaining why *The Firemen's Ball* aroused such furious official disapproval and why Forman is now working in America.

For the rest, however, one treads fairly hallowed ground: some rather nebulous information about how Forman worked with Papoušek and Passer on his scripts, and some more positive facts about the way particular places or situations sparked off ideas for films, the whole being fleshed out with eminently sensible but rather predictable answers to what were obviously very commonplace questions about Forman's ideas on cinema. Of Forman himself very little is allowed to peep through, except perhaps through his obvious delight in eccentrics like Vladimír Pucholt (who arrived at the Savoy Hotel during the London Festival with a suitcase containing two sets of underwear, one pair of socks, a rented tuxedo, and an amazing assortment of explosives in paper bags). Oh, yes: we do learn that he liked *The Good Soldier Schweik* but never managed to finish it.

TOM MILNE

Letters

Censorship

SIR,—Far from the activities of the censorship board being 'relatively insignificant' as Dr. Guy Phelps asserts (*SIGHT AND SOUND*, Spring 1976), they are increasingly repressive. More films are now being cut, or rejected, for reasons as contentious as they are often ludicrous, than are being kept off the screen for reasons of commercial apathy or public ignorance. In his eagerness to alert the local authorities, who have the only statutory powers to censor films, to what his office is up to, the censor has also provided an authoritative guide to the powers he and his staff possess and use, in ways that are not intended to be made public and, in many instances, would not survive public scrutiny.

I am surprised that, as the author of an excellent book on film censorship, Dr. Phelps believes that the really sinister grip on the circulation of the product is

exercised by commerce. He will have to concede, at least, that it was sponsorship by three critics which enabled *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* to get a screening in this country, despite the eagerness of its potential distributors to show it. It has now been seen fairly widely by private audiences who would otherwise not have had a chance to do so. Because of commerce? Or censorship?

Yours faithfully,

ALEXANDER WALKER

Evening Standard,
London, E.C.4.

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BBC-TV for *Days of Hope*.
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FILMS ON OFFER

Compiled by Nigel Algar and Steve Jenkins of the Central Booking Agency, *FILMS ON OFFER 1976*, just published, is a completely revised edition of this familiar publication. It now provides a fully comprehensive listing of all feature films currently available on 16mm in Britain together with details of their distributors and hire fees. It also includes a selective guide to short films. It has been re-indexed according to film title in strict alphabetical order and a director cross-index added. Although invaluable to film users, *FILMS ON OFFER* should also form a useful reference work for those not directly concerned with booking films, as each film listed is accompanied by details of its director, country of production, date and running time. Copies are sent free of charge to *Corporate Members* of the Institute, but copies are available for individual members and others from the Publications Department at £1.25 plus postage of 25p.

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Film Guide

ACES HIGH (EMI)

Taken out of the trenches into the air, given the *Oh! What a Lovely War* treatment (a song for every circumstance) and crudely rehashed to modernise the message, R. C. Sherriff's *Journey's End* gets lost in this unfocused adaptation. (Malcolm McDowell, Peter Firth, Christopher Plummer; director, Jack Gold.)

**ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN (Columbia-Warner)

Efficient newspaper thriller about ace *Washington Post* reporters Woodward (Robert Redford) and Bernstein (Dustin Hoffman) cracking the Watergate case. A painstaking and absorbing entertainment converting recent news into instant myth. (Jack Warden, Martin Balsam, Jason Robards; director, Alan J. Pakula.) Reviewed.

*BETWEEN WARS (Cinegate)

Intriguing first feature from ex-critic Michael Thornhill, investigating Australia's political and social climate between two world wars. The diffidence of its doctor hero (a neat performance from Corin Redgrave) leaves one remotely observing rather than participating in the movie, but it's a refreshingly different Australian import. (Arthur Dignam, Judy Morris, Patricia Leehy.)

*BLACK BIRD, THE

(Columbia-Warner)
Like Wilder's Sherlock Holmes, the Sam Spade reincarnated in this knockabout sequel to *The Maltese Falcon* is disgruntled with the myths of his profession. But there the resemblance ends, as David Giler has reinvented the hero in a noisy, graceless sit-com format, doing less than justice to George Segal's likeably harassed Sam Jr. (Stéphane Audran, Lionel Stander.)

CONDUCT UNBECOMING (British Lion)

Tedious adaptation of Barry England's play about the British Raj on the North-west Frontier. Audible creaks mingle with the 'By Gad Sirs' as a boulder in the mess sets a starry cast a-twitter about the regimental honour. (Michael York, Stacy Keach, Richard Attenborough, Trevor Howard, Susannah York; director, Michael Anderson.)

COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO, THE (Scotia-Barber)

A brisk run-through of Dumas' swashbuckling classic, with famous faces stuck flatly in all the key places and nerveless direction which suspiciously rouses itself to a climax every twenty minutes or so, as if anticipating some spectral commercial break. (Richard Chamberlain, Tony Curtis, Donald Pleasence, Louis Jourdan; director, David Greene.)

*DUCHESS AND THE DIRTWATER FOX, THE (Fox-Rank)

A Western send-up which scores some points off the more obvious targets (the hero is a very ham-fisted maverick; his horse is never in the right spot for the getaways), but really seems to have little use for the great outdoors or the

genre. (George Segal, Goldie Hawn, Roy Jensen, Thayer David; director, Melvin Frank.)

**FAMILY PLOT (CIC)

Lovely Hitchcock thriller in which the rediscovery of favourable stars (Barbara Harris and Bruce Dern especially) seems to have inspired a return to his true métier: suspense by wit rather than by blood. An irresistible marriage between the English period humour and the American mastery. (Karen Black, William Devane, Cathleen Nesbitt.) Reviewed.

GATOR (United Artists)

A sequel to *White Lightning* and Burt Reynolds' first stab at direction, alternating bearable action and romance with grueling slapstick and sermonising in a hokey tale about small town corruption in the Deep South. (Burt Reynolds, Lauren Hutton, Jack Weston.)

*HINDENBURG, THE (CIC)

A real disaster this time, treated with less of a circus flavour than other celluloid trials by fire and water. The thesis that an anti-Nazi saboteur was responsible for the disaster strikes few dramatic sparks, but Robert Wise chops with watchable efficiency between the on-board drama and little historical vignettes on the ground. (George C. Scott, Anne Bancroft, William Atherton.)

**HOLLYWOOD COWBOY (CIC)

Delightful comedy about fledgling Midwestern cowboy writer joining a film company in the early Thirties, with a delicate sense of fantasies colliding and interacting. Lively performances by Jeff Bridges and Blythe Danner. (Alan Arkin, Donald Pleasence, Andy Griffith; director, Howard Zieff.) Reviewed.

**HOT TIMES (DUK)

Fourth feature by Jim McBride (*David Holzman's Diary*), a screwball sex comedy with a hero out of *Archie Comics* striving all day to get his rocks off. Witty, inventive and unpredictable despite cuts and producer's bleeps, with surreal American vernacular delivered by a spirited cast. (Henry Cory, Clarissa Ainley, Jack Baran.)

*LEGACY (Cinegate)

A day in the life of a middle-aged, middle-class American woman, and her closely observed progress from frustration through despair to hysteria. The fantasies of a mind under private duress, by turns comic and sad but finally overbalancing from persuasive case history to mere virtuoso performance. (Joan Hotchkis; director, Karen Arthur.)

LIKELY LADS, THE (EMI)

Clement and La Frenais' Geordie duo become unlikely lads in this TV spin-off, which sacrifices the series' observation and comic logic in favour of trouser-dropping farce and a piecemeal narrative. Good lines pop up, but fans would be better served by repeats of the original. (Rodney Bewes, James Bolam, Brigit Forsyth; director, Michael Tuchner.)

MAHOGANY (CIC)

Diana Ross claws her way to success in the fashion world, only to find *la dolce vita* in Rome less rewarding than a social conscience in Harlem. A movie as glossily silly as its heroine's designs (in both senses of the word). (Billy Dee Williams, Anthony Perkins, Jean-Pierre Aumont; director, Berry Gordy.)

MAIDS, THE (Seven Keys)

Grotesque travesty of Genet's one-act play, with mannered, awkward performances (Glenda Jackson, Susannah York) and ill-judged additions, including an intermission. Only Vivien

Merchant as Madame recalls the original. (Director, Christopher Miles.)

**MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH, THE (British Lion)

Probably Nicolas Roeg's most eccentric film to date, in which his free association editing creates a dazzling web of speculation about David Bowie's visitor from a dying planet. Not all the pieces fit, and the metaphysical games with love and time create more strangeness than the film can contain, but a wealth of possibilities survive. (Buck Henry, Rip Torn, Candy Clark.) Reviewed.

**MISSOURI BREAKS, THE (United Artists)

Quirky Western, beautifully directed by Arthur Penn, which turns the folklore of *Butch Cassidy*—romantic outlawry threatened by creeping capitalism—into a pixilated comedy of manners. Marlon Brando is magnificent as the eccentric 'regulator', but Jack Nicholson is slyly, quietly his equal. (Kathleen Lloyd, Randy Quaid.) Reviewed.

**POACHERS (Cinegate)

Tough little tale about the nasty things lurking in Spain's political woods. The film keeps the allegory tucked well inside its psychological drama, which it marshals with trenchant black humour and a precise feel for the deadly ambiguities of behaviour. (Lola Gaos, Ovidi Montllor, Alicia Sanchez; director, José Luis Borau.)

**PROMISED LANDS

(Contemporary)
Passionate, pacifist and rigorously non-partisan, this highly subjective essay about suffering in Israel may traffic in a few of the morbidities it indicts, but it is still Susan Sontag's most searching and original film to date.

ROBIN AND MARIAN

(Columbia-Warner)
More of Richard Lester's time-travelling among literary and legendary adventurers. Ageing Robin returns from the Crusades and meets his ageing friends, lovers and enemies—a situation milked for rapid pathos in James Goldman's script, and the sprinkling of Lester jokes does little to strengthen the concoction. Sharp performances, though, from Sean Connery, Nicol Williamson and Audrey Hepburn. (Robert Shaw, Richard Harris, Ian Holm.)

SHOUT AT THE DEVIL

(Hemdale)
Elephantine plod through the action highlights of Wilbur Smith's best-seller about two rumbustious adventurers (Lee Marvin, Roger Moore) who wheel, deal and wage a private war against the wicked Germans (Prussian Mark I) in Africa during World War One. (Barbara Parkins, Ian Holm; director, Peter Hunt.)

**SIN OF FATHER MOURET, THE (Essential Cinema)

A splendid version of Zola's novel on the tribulations of the priesthood, and how excessive adoration of the Virgin leads one young cleric into sin. Franju's scene setting is more tersely realistic than the original, and his picture of Mouret's fantasy life more intensely ironic. (Francis Huster, Gillian Hills, André Lacombe.)

SLIPPER AND THE ROSE, THE (CIC)

The Cinderella yarn re-spun with pastel-shaded prettiness, mild good humour, and some instantly disposable musical numbers. Its rather wan and wearing charm is momentarily enlivened by Annette Crosbie's disarmingly prosaic Fairy Godmother. (Richard Chamberlain, Gemma Craven, Michael Hordern; director, Bryan Forbes.)

SWISS CONSPIRACY, THE (Columbia-Warner)

Imbecilic thriller about Swiss numbered bank accounts and a blackmail plot foiled by intrepid private eye (David Janssen, rather good). The cast, rather remarkably, contrive to sound dubbed (it's a U.S.-German co-production) even when they aren't. (Senta Berger, John Ireland, Ray Milland, John Saxon; director, Jack Arnold.)

**TAXI DRIVER (Columbia-Warner)

Martin Scorsese's best direction and Robert De Niro's best performance to date make the most out of an interesting but flawed script by Paul Schrader depicting New York as an expressionist Inferno. Despite some glib use of violence, a scorching experience. (Cybill Shepherd, Jodie Foster, Harvey Keitel.)

*TENDERNESS OF THE WOLVES (Cinegate)

A team of Fassbinder regulars conspire under Ulli Lommel's direction to recreate the gruesome exploits of Fritz Haarmann, the notorious Düsseldorf pederast and mass murderer. Vaguely political and simply staged, with lots of gore. (Kurt Raab, Margit Carstensen.)

THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT PART II (CIC)

Whatever the faults of the first selection of MGM musical clips, it at least had some glimmers of fun. But here the witless choices and tacky new sequences (with Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire, the former directing) do little but destroy some cherished illusions.

**TOUCH OF ZEN, A (Seven Keys)

Magical blend of ghost story, political intrigue and religious parable, King Hu's breathtaking epic overleaps the difficulties of a piecemeal plot to end up close to metaphysical martial arts. (Shih Chun, Hsu Feng, Pai Ying.)

**TRAVELLING PLAYERS, THE (Artificial Eye)

Thirteen years of modern Greek history, from occupation through civil war to dictatorship, as experienced by a group of actors. A brilliant display of the interaction of history and theatre, composed of a series of stunningly choreographed, Jancsó-like tableaux. (Eva Kotamanidou, Aliki Georgoulis, Statos Pachis; director, Theodor Angelopoulos.)

*VIGILANTE FORCE (United Artists)

Vividly scripted addition to the keep-violence-off-our-streets cycle, with excellent performances and Californian locations. Writer-director George Armitage (who scripted *Corman's Gas*) contrives to suggest that after Vietnam America deserves what it gets, but tends to be carried away by his violence. (Kris Kristofferson, Jan-Michael Vincent, Bernadette Peters.)

**WAVELENGTH (London Film-makers Co-op/Cinegate)

Michael Snow's first major film (1967) charts a mysterious, erotic 45-minute journey across a loft, moving through changes of colour, light, texture, grain and perspective. Literally by-passing 'plot' while re-locating narrative in the spectator's own trajectory, it has the conceptual excitement of a pure philosophical adventure.

W. C. FIELDS AND ME (CIC)

Random collection of scandalous highlights from the private life of the famous misanthrope, by turns apocryphal and sentimental. Rod Steiger's impersonation proceeds by fits and starts but largely keeps pace with the overriding vulgarity of the enterprise. (Valerie Perrine, John Marley, Jack Cassidy; director, Arthur Hillier.)

Don Siegel: American Cinema by Alan Lovell

A larger and revised version of the original 1968 booklet, intended as a working document produced in a particular critical/cultural situation and attempting to articulate issues arising from Siegel's work. *Price 55p (63p inc. postage)*

Cinema in Finland

edited by Jim Hillier

An introduction to the history, traditions, important figures, and the social and political background of a national cinema just beginning to get some attention through NFT seasons and festivals. *Price 55p (63p inc. postage)*

The Work of Dorothy Arzner: Towards a Feminist Cinema

edited by Claire Johnston

A survey of Dorothy Arzner's films which suggests ways of looking at or making films from a feminist point of view. *Price 45p (53p inc. postage)*

Television Monograph No. 1 Structures of Television

by Nicholas Garnham

An analysis of the organisational structures of British TV, emphasising their determination by social and ideological factors. The role of broadcasts and the public in this process, with some proposals for structural change. *Price 35p (43p inc. postage)*

Television Monograph No. 2 Light Entertainment

by Richard Dyer

A study of 'variety' on TV, from the circus to Cilla, from the Black and White Minstrels to Christmas Night with the Stars. The author describes the visual styles and procedures of a wide selection of shows, linking them with the ideals of energy, abundance and community they try to express. *Price 35p (43p inc. postage)*

Television Monograph No. 3 Television and the February 1974 General Election

by Trevor Pateman

This monograph attempts to analyse the use of television during the election as a medium independent of the parties and as a vehicle for them, and should be of interest to teachers of both film/TV and politics etc. *Price 55p (63p inc. postage)*

Television Monograph No. 4 Football on Television

edited by Edward Buscombe

There are five contributors to this study, which concentrates on football, and centres round the crucial problem of mediation and examines the extent to which sports programmes can really be seen as a 'record' of events. *Price 55p (63p inc. postage)*

Television Monograph No. 5

Television News

by Richard Collins

Television news clearly occupies a crucial position within the total output of broadcasting in this country. This study seeks to investigate some dominant assumptions and practices which govern the production of news on British television. *Price 55p (66p inc. postage)*

Labour Power in the British Film Industry

by Michael Chanan

A brief history of the growth of trade unionism in both the exhibition and production sides of the industry as far as World War II. Researching in a little-known area, the author has uncovered material which poses new problems to conventional film history. *Price 55p (66p inc. postage)*

Ozu

edited by John Gillett and David Wilson

An anthology of critical articles on this Japanese director, ranging from his earlier and hitherto little-known work, with its revealing echoes of American cinema, to his later masterpieces like *Tokyo Story*. Includes a filmography. *Price 25p (39p inc. postage)*

Fassbinder

edited by Tony Rayns

A comprehensive survey of this most prolific and controversial of German directors, setting his career against the political and economic background of postwar German cinema and including articles on his work for television and the theatre. Complete filmography. *Price 55p (66p inc. postage)*

Structural Film Anthology

edited and with an introduction by Peter Gidal

An extensive anthology of critical writing on Structural Film and film-makers, ranging from Michael Snow to Malcolm Le Grice, Hollis Frampton to Ken Jacobs. An invaluable introduction to this important but so far little documented area. *Price 75p. (91p inc. postage)*

Making 'Legend Of The Werewolf'

by Edward Buscombe

An account of the entire production cycle of a recent British horror film, *Legend of The Werewolf*, from scripting and set design through shooting to publicity and distribution. With many illustrations. *Price 95p (£1.11p inc. postage)*

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